STUDIES IN SLAVIC LITERATURE AND POETICS

The Gulag in Writings of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Varlam Shalamov

Memory, History, Testimony

Edited by Fabian Heffermehl

and Irina Karlsohn

BRILL

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Studies in Slavic Literature and Poetics

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Cover illustration: © Fabian Heffermehl.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Heffermehl, Fabian, editor. | Karlsohn, Irina, editor.
Title: The Gulag in writings of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Varlam Shalamov : memory, history, testimony / edited by Fabian Heffermehl, Irina Karlsohn.
Other titles: Studies in Slavic literature and poetics ; v. 63.
Description: Leiden ; Boston : Brill, 2021. | Series: Studies in Slavic literature and poetics, 01690175 ; volume 63 | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2021028446 | ISBN 9789004468450 (hardback) | ISBN 9789004468481 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr Isaevich, 1918-2008–Criticism and interpretation. | Shalamov, Varlam–Criticism and interpretation. | Russian prose literature–20th century–History and criticism. | Penal colonies in literature. | Memory in literature.
Classification: LCC PG3488.O4 Z67324 2021 | DDC 891.73/44–dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2021028446

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: "Brill". See and download: brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 0169-0175
ISBN 978-90-04-46845-0 (hardback)
ISBN 978-90-04-46848-1 (e-book)

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This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

Contents

Acknowledgements vii
Notes on Contributors viii

Introduction 1
Fabian Heffermehl and Irina Karlsohn

PART 1
Literary Origins

1 Discontinuities in the Evolution of *Kolyma Stories* and "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich" 17
Michael A. Nicholson

2 Poetry after the Gulag: Do Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov Have a Lyric Mindset? 45
Ulrich Schmid

3 More than a Cat: Reflections on Shalamov's and Solzhenitsyn's Writings through the Perspective of Trauma Studies 70
Andrea Gullotta

PART 2
Memory and Body

4 Why Did Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov Not Write *The Gulag Archipelago* Together? 99
Luba Jurgenson

5 Tactility and Memory in Shalamov 119
Fabian Heffermehl

6 "A Grudge-holding Body": Body and Memory in the Works of Varlam Shalamov 142
Franziska Thun-Hohenstein

7 Certain Properties of Rhyme: Poetic Language Touching Abomination 177
Irina Sandomirskaia

PART 3
History and Narrative

8 Counterfactuals and History in *The Gulag Archipelago* 203
Irina Karlsohn

9 *The Gulag Archipelago*: Rhetoric of History 227
Elena Mikhailik

10 Telling the Stories of Others and Writing the Bodies of Others: The Representation of Women in Shalamov's *Kolyma Stories* and Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* 249
Josefina Lundblad-Janjić

11 The Issue of "Softening" and the Problem of Addressivity in Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov 271
Leona Toker

Index 289

Acknowledgements

The inspiration for this book came from the international conference "The Gulag in Writings of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Varlam Shalamov: Fact, Document, Fiction," Uppsala University, Sweden, April 20–21, 2017. The editors wish to acknowledge the financial support of the Institute of Russian and Eurasian Studies at Uppsala University, as well as Dalarna University, University of Oslo, Hans och Dagmar Saléns Stiftelse, and Vera Sagers Stiftelse, which made possible the conference and this volume. For this assistance we are deeply grateful.

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Introduction

Fabian Heffermehl and Irina Karlsohn

The Western European discourse on the Holocaust has invented fundamentally new concepts of memory and recollection, and formed the basis for a new common European identity, which has thereby shifted from the heroic to the traumatic.[1] In Russia, however, de-Stalinization during "the Thaw" never produced any comparable institutional and political practices of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past). As Sergei Averintsev has noted: "Vergangenheitsbewältigung … is the task that all nations that had to go through a totalitarian experience, theoretically speaking, have to face. But actually, not all of them realize the necessity of this process."[2] He adds that the very idea of overcoming the past is something new. This idea, which stems from Karl Jaspers' 1946 essay "Die Schuldfrage" (The Question of Guilt), is a product of the same traumatic experiences that transformed the identity of Europeans and their relation to the past.[3] Neither the Soviet Union nor post-Soviet Russia had its Nuremberg trials. Moreover, today's Russia is experiencing a resurgence of Stalinist sympathies. The Stalinist terror is one of the most meticulously researched periods in Russian history, but the mainstream Russian media and educational discourse on historical traumas suffer under judicial restrictions on memorial activism. Additional constraints come in the form of pseudo-academic attempts to minimize the level of suffering in the labor camps, or to exaggerate economic and military advantages of the Great Terror.[4] These tendencies towards a rehabilitation of Stalin make clear the continuing importance of research on lacunas and strategies in the collective memory of the Gulag.

The collective memory preserves forms in order to transform images of what will become "history," transmitting them to new generations. These processes of *Vergangenheitsbearbeitung* (processing the past), shifting into *Ver-*

1 Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit* [The Long Shadow of the Past] (Munich: 2014).

2 Sergei Averintsev, "Overcoming the Totalitarian Past," *Religion in Eastern Europe* 24, no. 3 (2004), 29. For a discussion of the issue of historical and moral responsibility in relation to the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian political leadership, see also Igor Torbakov, "The Russian Orthodox Church and Contestations over History in Contemporary Russia," *Demokratizatsiya*, 22 (1), 2014, 145–170.

3 Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt* (New York: 1947).

4 For examples, see publications by Nikolai Starikov, Aleksandr Prokhanov or Yurii Zhukov.

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gangenheitsbewältigung, are closely connected with another idea: that of individual responsibility. Coming to terms with the past hinges on how each and every individual relates to the crimes that were committed. Collective guilt is dependent on collective will. Averintsev writes: "But there is only one antidote for a new totalitarianism, and that is a sense of individual responsibility for every word and action, and consequently, distrust of inculcation, of mass suggestion, and of the spirit of abstraction."[5] Thus every human being, in his or her attempts or failures, connects history with the future.

In this respect, Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1918–2008) and Varlam Shalamov (1907–1982) provide unique materials for studying the complex, multilevel relationship between testimony, memory, history and the issue of responsibility in Russia after Stalin's terror. Solzhenitsyn entered the canon of Russian literature with a varied personal experience of violence and sufferings: the Second World War, imprisonment, exile, then cancer. Shalamov spent three years in Vishera, in the northern Urals, and later seventeen years in Kolyma—officially recognized as the coldest place on Earth. From the 1950s they both became part of the Moscow literary establishment. After Solzhenitsyn published his "Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha" (One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich) in 1962, their common attempt to revitalize the collective memory of the camps brought the two men closer to each other.[6] However, already from the beginning, this mutual admiration seems to have been mixed with certain pragmatism. After a few years their lives took different paths.

The contrast between these paths could hardly be more striking. Solzhenitsyn, the 1970 Nobel Literature Prize Laureate, would during his lifetime turn from being one of the most prominent representatives of the anti-communist movement in the West into an equally central figure in the post-communist Russian national project. Shalamov, by contrast, died a miserable, almost unknown, death in a Moscow hospice in 1982, isolated by deafness and Ménière's disease from his surroundings, without ever seeing his main opus *Kolymskie rasskazy* (The Kolyma Stories) in print, except in substantial, but fragmentary publications abroad.

However, Solzhenitsyn's tremendous success as a fiction writer and (partly) as a political thinker never prevented him from making clear how he respected Shalamov. Indeed, he put Shalamov's Gulag experience in first place, before his own:

5 Averintsev, "Overcoming the Totalitarian Past," 30.

6 See Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "S Varlamom Shalamovym" [With Varlam Shalamov], *Novyi mir* 4 (1999), accessed December 15, 2019, magazines.russ.ru/novyi_mi/1999/4/solgen.html.

> I want to declare here that, apart from several individual points on which we disagree, no difference of interpretation has ever arisen between us in explaining the Archipelago. He and I evaluate the whole native [Gulag] life in the same way. Shalamov's camp experience was more bitter and longer than mine, and I acknowledge with esteem that it fell to him rather than me to plumb those depths of bestiality and despair to which the whole camp way of life was dragging us all down.[7]
>
> Я хочу здесь заявить, что, кроме нескольких частных пунктов, между нами никогда не возникало разнотолка в изъяснении Архипелага. Всю туземную жизнь мы оценили в общем одинаково. Лагерный опыт Шаламова был горше и дольше моего, и я с уважением признаю, что именно ему, а не мне досталось коснуться того дна озверения и отчаяния, к которому тянул нас весь лагерный быт.[8]

The Dantean circles go deeper in Shalamov than in Solzhenitsyn. It is Shalamov who "plumbed those depths," from where he would write with tactile energy about the atrocities in Kolyma. However, Shalamov's approach to Solzhenitsyn was far less generous:

> After so many talks with Solzhenitsyn I feel myself more plundered than enriched.
>
> После бесед многочисленных с Солженицыным чувствую себя обокраденным, а не обогащенным.[9]
>
> Solzhenitsyn's secret is that he is a hopeless graphomaniac and poetaster with all the characteristic psychic features of this terrible disease, and he generated an enormous output of inept verse, which ought never to be submitted or published anywhere. All his prose works from Ivan Denisovich to Maytryonas's Home were mere drops in this ocean of poetic dross.

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7 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918–1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*, trans. Thomas P. Whitney (vol. 1, 2) and Harry Willetts (vol. 3) (New York: 2007), vol. 2, 214.

8 Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr, *Arkhipelag Gulag. 1918–1956. Opyt khudozhestvennogo issledovaniia*, in idem, *Sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh* [Collected Works in Thirty Volumes], vols. 4–6 (Moscow: 2010), vol. 5, ch. 7.

9 Shalamov, *Zapisnye knizhki* [*Note Books*], in *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, 353. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are by Fabian Heffermehl.

> Тайна Солженицына заключается в том, что это – безнадежный стихотворный графоман с соответствующим психическим складом этой страшной болезни, создавший огромное количество непригодной стихотворной продукции, которую никогда и нигде нельзя предъявить, напечатать. Вся его проза от "Ивана Денисовича" до "Матрениного двора" была только тысячной частью в море стихотворного хлама.[10]

These, as well as other derogatory comments on Solzhenitsyn, belong to Shalamov's private notes. They were never intended to be published, and were produced in accordance with his principle of writing without a filter.[11] From this principle derives Shalamov's avant-garde originality, praised by Boris Pasternak as his affinity to the material aspect of the word[12]—"the thing speaks"[13]—which has inspired several essays in this volume.[14]

Solzhenitsyn became Shalamov's necessary antithesis and antidote and it was in opposition to Solzhenitsyn's belief in the moral strength of the human being that Shalamov built his own literary position. However, in *The Gulag Archipelago* Shalamov could not fill more than the role of one among many objects of an "artistic investigation." This imbalance in their relationship, whereby Solzhenitsyn became more important to Shalamov than vice versa, gradually turned their hidden controversy into an open one.

Their mutual antagonism and the impossibility of finding a common new idiom for depicting the Gulag have largely defined research on both authors, who have been seen in dichotomic categories as thinkers representing fundamentally different approaches to time and style in Russian literature: Solzhenitsyn in his continuation of Russian realism and Shalamov as a post-

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10 Ibid., 364. However, in his first letters to Solzhenitsyn, Shalamov expressed distinct appreciation of "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich." His poem of 1963 "Sosen svetlye kolonny" warmly commemorates his first meeting with Solzhenitsyn.

11 Shalamov's criticism of Solzhenitsyn, first published in the journal *Znamia* [The Banner] in 1995, came as a complete surprise to the latter. See Varlam Shalamov, "Iz zapisnykh knizhek," *Znamia*, no. 6 (1995) 134–175. Solzhenitsyn, "S Varlamom Shalamovym. Dobavlenie 1995 goda" [With Varlam Shalamov. Appendix from 1995], *Novyi mir* 4 (1999), accessed December 15, 2019, magazines.russ.ru/novyi_mi/1999/4/solgen.html.

12 Boris Pasternak, *Pis'mo V. T. Shalamovu* [Letter to Varlam Shalamov], July 9, 1952, in Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 6, 7.

13 "Рассказывает вещь." Shalamov, "Zolotaia medal'" [The Gold Medal], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, 222.

14 See also the recently published collected volume on Shalamov: *Schalamow, Lektüren*, ed. Matthias Schwartz and Dirk Naguschewski (Berlin: 2018).

avant-gardist representative of the avant-garde.[15] Their conflict seems to be a controversy between different approaches to their own "authorship," from Latin *auctoritas:* the authority to witness about the most terrible. In his self-characterization as "Pluto"—the god of the underworld, who can in no wise be understood in terms of a victim—Shalamov gives strong emphasis to his authority as witness, author, and judge of his times. Apparently, Shalamov did not question the legitimacy of writing. By contrast, in *The Gulag Archipelago* Solzhenitsyn repeatedly problematizes his own ability to grasp the reality of the Gulag. Thus he conveys an inner ambivalence in relation to his material and the ability to give words to what he describes. Agamben defined the "Muselmann" of Auschwitz (analogous to the *dokhodyaga* of the Gulag) in terms of inability to bring witness.[16] In *The Gulag Archipelago* Solzhenitsyn stages an imaginary dialog between his self—psychologically and morally strengthened through the camp experience—and those, already lying in the earth, who question his right to bear witness.[17] Thus Solzhenitsyn conveys the paradox of being at once survivor and witness, a paradox that forces him to be the editor of his own texts.

In contrast to Shalamov, Solzhenitsyn stands for the idea of an author with less visible contours, but who is accordingly more dynamic. Although Solzhenitsyn's own voice is unmistakable and loud (through sarcasm, categorical statements etc.), his idea of himself as an author depends on a multitude of external documentary sources and voices, and is therefore also subject to change. Shalamov, for his part, plays down the aspect of his own survival. His self-representation oscillates between what Franziska Thun-Hohenstein has characterized as a "writing out of death"[18] and terms of resurrection.[19]

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15 Klaus Städtke, "Sturz der Idole—Ende des Humanismus? Literaturmodelle der Tauwetterzeit: Solschenitsyn und Schalamow" [Fall of Idols—end of Humanism? Literary Models of the Thaw: Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov], in *Osteuropa*, no. 6 (2007); Mikhailik, Elena, "Kot, begushchii mezhdu Solzhenitsynym i Shalamovym" [The Cat that Runs between Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov], in idem, *Nezakonnaia kometa. Varlam Shalamov: opyt medlennogo chteniia* [A Forbidden Comet. Varlam Shalamov: An Exercise in Close Reading] (Moscow: 2018), 284–298.

16 Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz* (New York: 2002).

17 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 2, 501.

18 Franziska Thun-Hohenstein, "Die Kraft des Authentischen," in Varlam Schalamow, *Die Auferweckung der Lärche, Erzählungen aus Kolyma 4* (Berlin: 2011), 574–575.

19 See Zaal Andronikaschwili, "Die Erinnerung der Toten. Zur Erzählethik von Warlam Schalamow" [The Remembrance of Death. On Varlam Shalamov's Writing Technique], in *Schalamow. Lektüren* [Shalamov. Readings], ed. Dirk Naguschewski, Matthias Schwartz, (Berlin: 2018).

Solzhenitsyn's doubt in his authorship, as well as his appreciation of Shalamov's, draws on his confidence in testimonies of another category than the testimony he could find in historical documents. Consequently, his approach to investigating and mapping the Gulag involves artistic means. Andrew Wachtel notes Solzhenitsyn's coherence in his attempt to give to history an artistic shape. Although explicitly belonging to classical Russian literature, Solzhenitsyn even eliminates the distinction between fact and fiction.[20] "As a result, in his work invention is consistently given the shape of a non-fictional narrative while history is consistently transformed into a work of fiction. While Russian writers before him built their narrations on the dialogue of counterposed history and fiction, Solzhenitsyn removes this opposition altogether."[21] Georges Nivat makes a similar observation regarding *The Gulag Archipelago*: "Solzhenitsyn's greatest discovery made in the process of working on the *Archipelago* was that it was impossible to write the genuine history of the twentieth century based on documents because a document is either mendacious or missing [altogether]…"[22]

In his 1972 short story "Perchatka" (The Glove) Shalamov describes skin diseases caused by lack of vitamins in the camps. The skin peels off like a glove from the hand of Shalamov's undernourished fictional "I." The fingerprint of the glove is identical with the fingerprint of the writer's hand. This identity of two skin images becomes the starting point for a meta-reflection, in which Shalamov questions his authorship. By what right, at a distance of almost thirty years, and with a new skin, can he write about the suffering of the old skin—the skin of the dead?[23] In this perspective, Shalamov's

20 On Solzhenitsyn's dual orientation towards Russian classics as well as European modernism, see Richard Tempest, *Overwriting Chaos: Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's Fictive Worlds* (Brookline, MA: 2019).

21 Andriu Vakhtel [Andrew Wachtel], "Razdvigaia granitsy prostranstva i vremeni: Andrich, Solzhenitsyn i problema istorizma" [Expanding the Boundaries of Space and Time: Andrić, Solzhenitsyn and the Problem of Historicism], in *Zhizn' i tvorchestvo Aleksandra Solzhenitsyna: Na puti k "Krasnomu Kolesu"* [Life and Works of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Towards *The Red Wheel*], ed. Liudmila Saraskina (Moscow: 2013), 247. See also the chapter on Solzhenitsyn in Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *An Obsession with History: Russian Writers Confront the Past* (Stanford, CA: 1995).

22 "Величайшее открытие Солженицына, сделанное им в процессе работы над 'Архипелагом', заключалось в том, что подлинную историю XX века невозможно писать на основе документов, ибо документа нет или же он лжет …." Zhorzh Niva [George Nivat], *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Borets i pisatel'* [Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. A Champion and a Writer] (St. Petersburg: 2014), 59.

23 See Sarah J. Young, "Recalling the Dead: Repetition, Identity and the Witness in Varlam Shalamov's Kolymskie Rasskazy," in *Slavic Review*, vol. 70 (2) (2011), 353–372.

ambiguous approach to his authorship seems to derive from self-alienation (the *Doppelgänger* as enemy), whereas for Solzhenitsyn the doubt derives from self-identification (identification with his own fate as survivor).

Both Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn struggle with the problem of being authoritative vis-à-vis their material. Mikhailik has emphasized a cat, mentioned by Solzhenitsyn in his *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, as a powerful allegory of the controversies between the two writers. In his first letter to Solzhenitsyn Shalamov claims this detail to be impossible. In accordance with his own experience such a cat would have been eaten.[24] In the present book Andrea Gullotta interprets the cat-topos in terms of trauma theory. In the second part of our volume chapters by Luba Jurgenson, Fabian Heffermehl, Franziska Thun-Hohenstein and Irina Sandomirskaia, indicate another dimension of the cat: the cat represents a new idea of the form, of Solzhenitsyn's realism versus Shalamov's anti-aesthetics, of—and that is what the cover of this book is meant to illustrate—the contradiction in the authors' memory between a facial, figurative, expressive cat, and memory reduced to a fingerprint.

Chapter Overview

Part 1 of this volume, "Literary Origins," examines the evolution of Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn as writers from a comparative perspective. Although each of the two had been drawn since the 1930s to prose as well as to verse, fundamentally different aesthetic views led Shalamov to refuse Solzhenitsyn's offer of becoming the co-author of *The Gulag Archipelago*.

In Chapter 1, Michael Nicholson notes that Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov both experienced an early passion for literature, wrote assiduously and entertained hopes of publication before the decisive arrest in their lives. Moreover, they both emerged from the Stalinist-era camps, variously traumatized and reclusive, and resumed their compulsively writing. Nicholson looks backwards from the 1950s, when "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich" was written and *The Kolyma Stories* begun. He views the emergence of those celebrated works on the Gulag theme against the background of the two authors' extant earlier literary experiments. The basis for this undertaking proves to be not only fragmentary, but surprisingly uneven. Quite apart from the obvious effects of the difference in length and severity of the two men's labor-camp sentences, the textual basis for assessing their literary direction before their arrests survives,

24 See note 15.

largely by chance, to a far greater extent in Solzhenitsyn's case than in that of Shalamov. Discussing the insights afforded by the surviving textual materials, Nicholson reconstructs tendencies and tensions in Solzhenitsyn's writings over two decades that led up to the writing of "Ivan Denisovich" and offers some surmises about the impact of captivity upon the chronotope of his narrative prose and verse. By contrast, the little that Shalamov could compose in Kolyma up to about 1949 did not, with very few exceptions, survive the appalling rigors of his protracted sentence.

Lyric poetry was the primary form of expression for both these authors. Based in a Hegelian nexus of poetry and truth, in Chapter 2, Ulrich Schmid asks: do Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov possess "a lyric mindset"? Through analyses of Solzhenitsyn's short story "Matrenin dvor" (Matryona's Home) and *The Gulag Archipelago*, Schmid shows how Solzhenitsyn strove towards harmony between two literary genres—poetry and traditional epic. Shalamov, on the other hand, sought to separate poetry from his prose. Schmid notes a profound contradiction between Shalamov's literary theory and praxis. His inability to create a consistent theory of literature was founded in his Sisyphean attempt to write about the Gulag without employing aesthetic, artistic means. Therefore, Shalamov's poems and prose reflect the tragedy of the Gulag in a way analogical to the implications of Adorno's rejection of poetry after Auschwitz. Elaborating on the post-lyric and post-Dantesque conditions for literature after the Gulag, Schmid explores the inherent aesthetic reasons for the contestation between Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov.

In Chapter 3, Andrea Gullotta argues that Shalamov's writing process appears as a practice parallel to symptoms described in trauma theory. Shalamov's writing emerges from an individual complex of processes, aimed at "acting out" the cruelties of his past. Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* is, by contrast, described as the "collective work of culture." Relying on theoretical approaches by La Capra and Caruth, Gullotta investigates analogues between clinical studies of PTSD and literature. His hypothesis is that differences in the intensity of trauma experienced by Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn had a direct impact on their choice of literary form.

While Solzhenitsyn's literary oeuvre proceeds from ethical values and ideas, Shalamov seems to promote an anti-metaphysical, even anti-ethical, position, which might be described in terms of a material turn. He shares with artists of the 20th century an interest in the autopoietic virtue of pigments, writing materials and paper. Part 2 of this volume, "Memory and Body" is inspired by Shalamov's modernism, how modernism marks the difference between him and Solzhenitsyn, and the connection between modernism and traumatic memory.

Why did Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov not write *The Gulag Archipelago* together? Proceeding from this question, Luba Jurgenson's Chapter 4 examines how the two authors in different ways related to two collective entities: a) the collective of authors from the history of Russian literature, and b) the collective of witnesses from the Gulag. Both authors strove towards a "uchronia," which corresponds in terms of time with what in space is utopia—a non-time that has passed. Shalamov's "uchronia" turned towards the Silver Age, while Solzhenitsyn focused on the classics of the 19th century. In a way reminiscent of futurist poetics, Shalamov made the methods and instruments of his writing legible for the reader, even turning memory into a graspable device. This resurrection of avant-gardism required distance from classic Russian literature, and a strengthened emphasis on Shalamov's own individuality—which ruled out the possibility of serving as co-author of *The Gulag Archipelago*. Investigating the inner motives that first brought the two authors close to each other, and later split them apart, Jurgenson contributes to memory studies in the widest sense, showing the transformation of witness into author, of document into literature.

In the complicated relationship between Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn Fabian Heffermehl sees, in Chapter 5, an anti-political tendency that precludes any Russian analog to the German politics of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. For Shalamov "...the author is no observer, no spectator, but a participant in the drama of life ... Pluto ascending from Hell, and not Orpheus descending into Hell." The Cartesian optical separation between an observing subject and an observed object—between the self and the world, and at the same time between subject and object of the terror (executioner and victim)—is impossible. Instead, Shalamov proposes a view of the writer as part of the literary space s/he creates. A written, suffering object is internalized in a writing subject. Shalamov's awareness of himself as an object derives first of all from his Gulag experience as a fragile and 'porous I', denied the writer's possibility of descriptive distance from the events that he narrates. Secondly, the fusion of subject and object can be traced back to artistic practices of the Russian avant-garde, with which Shalamov became acquainted in the 1920s. Against this double background of revolution and banishment, traditional paradigms of image and perception are erased, reinterpreted or perverted.

In Chapter 6, Franziska Thun-Hohenstein elucidates the distinctive use of bodily and physiological metaphors in Shalamov on the basis of his poetry and hitherto unresearched archive materials. The question of relations between body, thing ("there is no tale, the thing speaks") and verbal flesh (the acoustic apparatus) as bearers of memories arises insistently in Shalamov's poems and prose. The body exists in a double hypostasis: on the one hand as the

atrophied body in the camp, melting away and disappearing before our eyes; and on the other hand, as a surviving body which, under extreme conditions, preserves the memories of the convict. The specificity of his poetry is studied in relation to both philosophical and literary models of memory. The resurrection of memory from the forgotten is possible only through deliberate effort on the part of not only the cognitive, but also the physiological apparatus. Memory hurts. Aleida Assmann has defined "traumatic memory" as what remains forever written in the body. Thus, Thun-Hohenstein hypothesizes that Shalamov employs his memory in writing in order to resurrect the feeling of a wound. The collective trauma of the Gulag is thereby turned into accessible discourse.

Irina Sandomirskaia's Chapter 7 analyzes in Shalamov's poetic language the effect of tactility that emerged out of his experience of violence. Violence is performed by means of tools that are tangible in the broadest sense. The lawlessness of the taiga, the extreme temperatures and darkness of the High North—these are graspable instruments of a man-made machine of extermination. However, utilization of the wilderness also means its cultivation: the subjugation of the taiga to the industry of ideological aesthetics, which finally turns nature into a respectable "memorial park." Memory is deeply rooted both in *stikhiia* (the forces of nature) and *stikhotvorenie* (poetry). Oblivion is therefore another word for the cultivation of memory under the banner of socialist realism. Based on this cultural criticism, Sandomirskaia examines Shalamov's relationship with Pasternak and the parallels between his poetry and Western European modernism. In a comparison with the painter Francis Bacon she finds emancipation from representation as a common principle, whereby violence becomes integrated as a strategy to overpower (*preodolet'*) evil.

The third part of this volume, "History and Narrative," brings together three approaches to the complex multi-layered relationship between history and memory. Both Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov struggled with a policy of obliviation and dogmaticisation of historical narratives. To what extent does the Gulag represent a rupture with Russian history and with human culture? What impact did the catastrophic experience of the Gulag have on Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov's understanding of the movement of history, its contrafactuality and possibilities for prophecy?

Viewing his own task as one of restoring the historical experience of the Russian people and trying "to explain the slow course of history and the nature of that history," Solzhenitsyn assumed the dual role of writer and historian. One of the most distinctive features in *The Gulag Archipelago* is that Solzhenitsyn frequently employs counterfactuals or modal claims, challenging established historical facts and presenting alternative scenarios. Recent dec-

ades have seen rapid growth in the genres of "counterfactual" and "alternative" history, accompanied by investigations by literary scholars and historians. The use of counterfactuals has become particularly common in historical texts, and modal assertions generally permeate the writing of history. Irina Karlsohn (Chapter 8) applies insights from recent scholarship to examine the use of counterfactuals in *The Gulag Archipelago*. Why and how did Solzhenitsyn use them? What issues did he connect with counterfactual assertions? Her examination reveals that counterfactual claims in Solzhenitsyn's book have several important functions. They actually shape the whole historiographical narrative of the book; analysis of them improves our understanding of the border between fiction and history in this work as well as in Solzhenitsyn's magnum opus *The Red Wheel*.

Elena Mikhailik's Chapter 9 reconstructs Solzhenitsyn's optics at the time when *The Gulag Archipelago* was written and edited. By identifying and analyzing systemic discrepancies that occur in his description of pre-Revolutionary Russia and his portrayal of the changes wrought by the October Revolution on the penal system and on the fabric of society as a whole, she shows how Solzhenitsyn was proceeding from his concept of history in which the very existence of the labor camp system in all its complexity supposedly proved that the October Revolution was a loathsome thing to be crushed. However, the resultant text proved to be a contradictory, subversive structure, neither wholly Dantesque, nor wholly Braudelian.

While the chapters in Part 2 are devoted to the *body* as the authors' self-representation, in Chapter 10, Josefina Lundblad-Janjić concentrates on the external bodies—the bodies of the female Others. In Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov's presentations of women, she traces how the problem of gender undermines their claims to yield authentic and verifiable testimony. How women and the female experience figure in both *The Gulag Archipelago* and *The Kolyma Stories* illuminates features of the authors' respective story-telling strategies as regards the appropriation of the stories of others for their own testimonial or literary aims. The focus of Lundblad-Janjić's investigation is the depictions of Natalia Stolyarova, whom both authors knew personally.

Finally, in Chapter 11, Leona Toker argues that one significant point of difference between Solzhenitsyn's and Shalamov's work was the circumstance that Solzhenitsyn's main target audience comprised persons who had no first-hand experience of the camps, whereas prominent in Shalamov's primary target audience were people already familiar with the camps, not least as inmates. However, Shalamov's stories also address the "authorial audience," that is, readers who have been spared imprisonment in the camps but wish to learn the codes that the author shares with his primary target audience. The blank

spaces and moments of obscurity in Shalamov's stories imply that his immediate target audience could be expected to supply versions of the missing parts of the script.

The impact of Solzhenitsyn's "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich" is rooted mainly in the paradigmatic method through which the novella gave its audience the impression of learning "what it was like in the camps" but also in the representation of one relatively "good" day in one camp. This narrative choice is part of what Solzhenitsyn referred to as the "lightening" of the material. One effect of such "lightening" is to ease the audience's imaginative immersion in the world of the Gulag. By contrast, Shalamov tends to challenge his authorial audience. Instead of "lightening" the material, he creates pulsation effects: harsh blows to the reader's imagination, alternating with passages that give the emotions a rest. The audience is denied the sense of a full understanding of conditions in the camp; instead, it is stimulated to opt for the kinds of reflection usually reserved for the art of fiction rather than for non-fictional narratives of testimony.

Toker notes that "the attesting function" of the narratives of Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn have now become partly redundant. They are read first of all in their capacity as great Russian authors, not Gulag authors. "The target audiences of Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov no longer exist," writes Toker, "they can now be seen mainly as historical constructs that may improve our understanding of the two writers' narrative choices." This volume accordingly aims to provide insights into the literary strategies of Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov, and, in an extended sense, into the capacity of art to provide testimony where documents no longer exist.

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PART 1

Literary Origins

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CHAPTER 1

Discontinuities in the Evolution of *Kolyma Stories* and "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich"

Michael A. Nicholson

For authors, both actual and aspiring, arrest and incarceration in the Stalin years fundamentally threatened the practical pursuit of their *métier* and the continuity of those aspirations. Would their literary archives escape confiscation? or had their recent efforts, like those of so many others, already glutted the maw of the Lubianka furnace? Even if they survived their sentence, would the conditions they must endure until that distant day permit any exercise of the creative imagination—or offer any means of preserving its fruits? Whatever "material," stimuli, and insights the survivor might accumulate along the way, the reality of the camps (if not this one, then the next) was likely to ensure the catastrophic disruption of any semblance of normal literary development.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's "Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha" (One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich) and Varlam Shalamov's *Kolymskie rasskazy* (Kolyma Stories) were each begun a few years after their respective authors' release from captivity. This chapter is not concerned with appraising these celebrated texts in their own right, much less with pitting the one against the other. Instead, it looks backwards from each of these landmark publications in search of surviving evidence of their authors' literary efforts in the periods before and during their camp experiences. It then asks what light, if any, this literary prehistory might cast upon the emergence of each of each of these two canonical Gulag texts. The long-acknowledged difference in duration and severity of Shalamov's and Solzhenitsyn's captivity in the Gulag will prove to be but one of a series of sharply divergent factors which inevitably lend the ensuing discussion a certain asymmetry.

Kolyma Stories

While a student and aspiring writer in Moscow, Shalamov had in 1927 become involved in promoting and circulating Lenin's suppressed letter to the 13th Congress of the Russian Communist Party. This indiscretion not only earned

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him his first, relatively brief and mild encounter with the Gulag, but also made it almost inevitable that he would be swept up in the purges of the late 1930s. That second arrest (in 1937, on grounds of Trotskyite sympathies) ushered in the defining experience of his life: his consignment to and protracted detention in the labor camps of Kolyma. It was not until 17 years later, in 1954, soon after he managed to return to central Russia, that Shalamov began the first drafts of what would become the *Kolyma Stories*.

If we look back over the decades before 1954 for contemporary evidence or direct textual illustrations of Shalamov's literary inclinations and attainments from the 1910s to the 1930s, we soon encounter obstacles. His collected writings and correspondence are not insubstantial, and his various memoirs and autobiographical writings furnish vivid, if often fragmentary, accounts of different periods of his childhood and youth. Most, though, were written long after the event, in the late 1960s and the 1970s, either during or even after the writing of the *Kolyma Stories* themselves. What, then, of the closer perspective that Shalamov's early literary legacy might reveal? If we focus initially upon Shalamov the poet, we will find that his later memoirs and essays attest persuasively to the primacy of verse throughout his life. We see him seizing every opportunity to write poetry, from schooldays onwards, and enjoying in his twenties the exhilarating experience of rubbing shoulders with established literary figures surrounding the journal *LEF* (The Left Front of the Arts). Promising as this may sound, it was soon overshadowed by the first of a series of archival depredations.

> In 1927 when I was living at university, my own sister burnt everything, down to the last sheet of paper, letters from Nikolai Aseev, from Sergei Tret'iakov … For no other reason than that, for a while, I had been registered as living with her.
>
> В 1927 году, когда я жил в университете, родная моя сестра сожгла всё до последней бумаги, письма – Асеева, Третьякова … Всё просто потому, что я некоторое время был там, у нее, прописан.[1]

After Shalamov was arrested in 1929, at least some of his papers survived and remained in family safekeeping until 1941, but then they too fell prey to

1 Shalamov, "Bol'shie pozhary" [Conflagrations], in Varlam Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh* [Collected Works in Six Volumes], vol. 4 (Moscow: 2004–2005), 556–557. Henceforth: *Sobranie sochinenii*.

the flames: "My family destroyed my archive together with that of my father, burning them before they left Moscow during the evacuation."[2] These textual ravages make any hopes of one day poring over Shalamov's juvenilia or the fruits of his *LEF* years unrealistic.[3]

But what of the verse of his prolific 1930s? In the interval between the end of his first sentence in 1931 and the beginning of his second in 1937, Shalamov had made his living in Moscow as a journalist, while devoting his meagre leisure and his hopes for the future to creative writing. Years later, he recalled overcoming the influence of Boris Pasternak and Innokentii Annenskii, and beginning to find his own poetic voice even as the shadows of his second arrest were gathering. With three notebooks of finished poems, some 200 in all,[4] he dreamt of seeing a volume of his verse in print before too long. These hopes, and with them our own prospects of ever reading Shalamov's poems of the 1930s, were dashed by the cataclysm of 1937. Now it was the turn of Shalamov's wife to burn evidence of her arrested husband's creative output.[5]

In the desolation of the labor camps, Shalamov was far from alone in turning to poetry as a crutch to lean on. Initially, he did succeed in creating and memorizing some poems of his own—even, rarely, in committing them to paper, as in 1943 and 1944, when he lay emaciated and hospitalized at Belich'ia. But time was against him, and Kolyma inexorably lived up to its reputation. Soon "everything to do with verse was driven out, beaten out, dried out, squeezed out of my body and soul."[6] All that remained by 1949 were randomly recurring snatches and fragments, while "the remainder—so much more important, significant and dear to my heart—was lost without trace."[7] In that year, with barely two more to serve, Shalamov found himself, a newly

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2 "Семья уничтожила и мой архив, вместе с архивом моего отца сожгла – перед отъездом из Москвы во время эвакуации." Ibid., 556.

3 An exception that proves the rule is his recollection of a single line from one of his poems of 1915 which became a bone of contention between the young Shalamov and a dogmatic schoolteacher. "Moia zhizn'—neskol'ko moikh zhiznei" [My Life—My Several Lives], ibid., 298. For other references to isolated survivals, see, e.g. Shalamov, "Koe-chto o moikh stikhakh" [A Word or Two about My Verse], ibid., 97–98.

4 Shalamov's estimates of the actual numbers of his early works are prone to fluctuation.

5 Shalamov, "Moia zhizn'," 307. For one attempt, in 1954, to retrieve his lost verse of the Five-Year Plan era, see Shalamov's note to the poem "Kama tridtsatogo goda" [The River Kama, 1930], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, 472.

6 "Все стихотворное было вытравлено, выбито, высушено, выдавлено из моей души и тела." Shalamov, "Poet iznutri" [A Poet from the Inside], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, 165.

7 "… утратилось другое бесследно, гораздо более важное, значительное и дорогое для меня." Shalamov's commentary on the poem, "Igroiu detskoi uvlechennyi…" [Carried Away by Children at Play], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, 470.

fledged paramedic, granted the stunning luxury of a freezing, ramshackle hut of his own. There at Duskan'ia Springs he experienced a virtual eructation of pent-up creativity that "gushed into my pen in an irresistible flood, like some lethal paroxysm of vomiting."[8] Some of these first poems by the then ravaged forty-year-old Shalamov he later deemed worthless, barely coherent. Of those which augmented them from 1951 on, a substantial number could not be smuggled out of Kolyma, and Shalamov had the misery of burning them with his own hands on the eve of his departure.[9] But other Kolyma poems, perhaps even several hundred,[10] did survive to form the earliest extant stratum of his poetic oeuvre. Efforts continue to establish a firmer archival and textological basis for this body of relatively early poems, assembled in Shalamov's *Kolymskie tetradi* (Kolyma Exercise Books), often only tentatively dated and in most cases subjected to multiple rewriting.[11]

They were undoubtedly born of the Gulag experience, and many preceded his first *Kolyma Stories*, albeit by only a few years.[12] One such poem of 1949, "Stlanik" (alluding to a prostrate shrub of the far North, *Pinus pumila*), famously anticipates a later "Kolyma story" of the same title and with the same allegorical theme.[13] But the relationship between the poems of Kolyma and the stories which were soon to emerge is generally anything but a simple, causal one. Shalamov's labor-camp verse arose not as a stopgap or mnemonically useful substitute for stories he was yet to write. Nor did the intensity of his poetic striving diminish once he had turned to prose. A single short poem from 1949, "He warms his freezing fingers…,"[14] may illustrate the point. Shalamov composed its four short stanzas out in the freezing cold at Duskan'ia Springs. They describe the shambling figure of a man whose attention is caught by the sight of currents stirring beneath the surface of an ice-bound stream.

8 "вытолкнулось на перо нечто неукротимое, как смертельная рвота…" Shalamov, "Bol'shie pozhary," 553.

9 Ibid., 554–555.

10 Shalamov, "Koe-chto o moikh stikhakh," 108–109.

11 Sergei Solov'ev, "Sozdanie virtual'nogo arkhiva Varlama Shalamova" [The Creation of a Varlam Shalamov Virtual Archive], https://shalamov.ru/research/190/. See also Irina Sirotinskaia, "K voprosam tekstologii poeticheskikh proizvedenii V. Shalamova" [On Questions of the Textology of Varlam Shalamov's Poetical Works], *IV Mezhdunarodnye shalamovskie chteniia* (Moscow: 1997), 114–119.

12 Shalamov's selective commentaries, included in the first book edition of *Kolymskie tetradi* (Moscow: 1994), provisionally date more than a score of poems as having been composed during or after 1954, the start of his *Kolyma Stories*.

13 The story is in *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, 1979–1980. For the poem and Shalamov's commentary see ibid., vol. 3, 230–231 and 462.

14 "Он пальцы замерзшие греет…" Ibid., 127–128.

He laughs hoarsely as, with dulled brain and numbed fingers, he succeeds in capturing and scribbling down the elusive meaning of the scene. In his later annotation to his earliest poems Shalamov holds up this composition as "самое колымское мое стихотворение" (the poem of mine most redolent of Kolyma).[15] The verse that Shalamov wrested from his battered consciousness and the frozen landscape about him was not always as terse and self-reflexive as this, his exemplary Kolyma lyric. And, even in this instance, readers of the story "Sententsiia" will recognize the affinity between Kolyma story and Kolyma poem. In each, a figure stumbles back from the brink of extinction, drawn on by his faltering rediscovery of language and imagination.

Yet, regardless of occasional congruence of setting, theme, and mood, Shalamov tended to view the genres of poetry and prose in contradistinction, and he held with fierce, almost aristocratic pride to his poetic calling. In his essays and letters he tends to speak as an adept, initiated into the arcane rituals and wonders of his craft, heartily despising epigones and poetasters (among whom he came to number Solzhenitsyn). Writing to Pasternak in the same year when he set down the first of his Kolyma stories, Shalamov made a sharp generic distinction:

> My verse is still on the same old theme, and I doubt it will release its grip on me any time soon. The stories I have started writing cost me a great deal of effort—it's just a completely different process.[16]

Almost twenty years later, he was still making essentially the same point, culminating in an assertion that, apparently, brooks no contradiction:

> … poetry is a special world, unconnected to the laws of prose literature by anything other than the 32 letters of the [Russian] alphabet. One should not look in poetry for anthropomorphism, progressive ideas, cryptic allegories. It needs a different approach. Poetry is poetry.
>
> Стихи – это особый мир, ничем не связанный с законами художественной прозы, кроме 32 букв алфавита. В стихах не надо искать ни

15 Ibid., 434. Shalamov adds that it is one of very few of his poems that he could never bring himself to revise.

16 "В моих стихах я все в старой теме, и вряд ли отпустит она меня скоро. Рассказы, которые начал писать, достаются мне с большим трудом – там ведь ход совсем другой." Shalamov, Letter to B. L. Pasternak, October 24, 1954, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 6, 56.

> антропоморфизма, ни прогрессивных идей, ни тайных аллегорий. Стихи требуют другого подхода. Стихи – это стихи.[17]

Here, at his most categorical, Shalamov seems implicitly to rule out any direct cross-fertilization between the verse and the prose of Kolyma. But the mature Shalamov is often more insistent than he is consistent, and he will upon occasion allow that the boundaries between these genres might, after all, blur—indeed, that "prose very frequently crosses over into poetry and back."[18] He also offers a specific crumb of comfort for those seeking links between the Kolyma verse and the *Kolyma Stories*. Taking Tsvetaeva's prose as his example, Shalamov concedes: "Inculcated by long years of working in verse, the habit of writing economically and laconically, of choosing the precise word—produces a most beneficial effect [upon prose]."[19] His recognition of an affinity between the genres at least in terms of economy and laconicism provides a convenient prompt for the transition from poetic to "prosaic" antecedents of Shalamov's *Kolyma Stories*. For, bare as Shalamov's pre-Kolyma poetic cupboard may be, his prose—the journalistic pieces and scant surviving fictional works of the 1930s—does yield something approaching a textual vantage-point, looking ahead to the writing of the *Kolyma Stories*.

Between 1932 and 1937 Shalamov published, in his own words, "an enormous volume of sketches, essays, feuilletons, dispatches in newspapers and journals,"[20] only occasionally departing from the routine factory and industrial themes of the day to address literary topics, such as a reminiscence of Vladimir Maiakovskii and items on factory preparations to mark Pushkin's anniversary. There was not, he claimed, a factory, workers' canteen or hostel in the Moscow region that he had not visited at one time or another.[21] This journalistic drudgery continued side by side with intense literary creation. It has associations pointing back to a literary battle that Shalamov had witnessed

17 Shalamov, Letter to L. N. Chertkov, December 2, 1973, ibid., 585.

18 "Проза переходит в поэзию и обратно очень часто." Shalamov, *Chetvertaia Vologda* [The Fourth Vologda], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 4, 7.

19 "Воспитанная многолетней работой над стихами привычка к экономии и лаконичности, к выбору точного слова, самым благодетельным образом действует." Shalamov, "Poet i proza" [The Poet and Prose], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, 77. But note here the hierarchy: not the relative equality of "poet i prozaik" or "poeziia i proza," much less the precedence of "prozaik i poeziia."

20 Cit. in G. N. Trifonov, "K bibliografii V. T. Shalamova" [On the Bibliography of V. T. Shalamov], *Sovetskaia bibliografiia*, no. 3 (1988), 68. See also the bibliography appended to *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, 660–664.

21 Shalamov, "Moskva 30-kh godov" [Moscow in the 1930s], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 4, 438.

at close quarters in the late 1920s, and forward to his own emphasis upon documentary truth and facts when arguing for a "new prose" in the 1950s and beyond. The former aspect involves Sergei Tret'iakov, eminent spokesmen for *LEF*, to which Shalamov was still close. On the eve of Shalamov's first arrest, Tret'iakov was one of those championing a hardnosed proletarian "Literature of Fact" against the afficionados of High Art. Shalamov, by his later account, was already disillusioned with *LEF* in-fighting and beginning to have doubts about the very purpose of poetry and art. In that mood of lassitude, he wrote to Tret'iakov and swiftly found himself in face-to-face discussion with a man who "taught journalism and sketch-writing tirelessly, vividly and engagingly"[22] and was obsessed with functional, organizational issues. Shalamov had an enduring respect for literary professionalism well into old age, and it seems likely that his early involvement with Tret'iakov at least stood him in good stead in the practical side of his work as an industrial journalist in the 1930s.

But more than that, Tret'iakov and the other *faktoviki* marched under the banner of facts, life, and documentary authenticity. Their 1929 collection of essays on "the literature of fact" gives an immediate sense of the terms in which they couched their campaign against "Art" and "Literature." In his preface, Nikolai Chuzhak rejects "the literature of idle invention, borne aloft under the banner of an esoteric so-called 'art,' mystically predetermined for all time,"[23] in favour of "a literature of the document-fact," "a literature not of naïve, false verisimilitude but of the most matter-of-fact truth, expressed with maximal precision."[24] Other contributors to this programmatic work deplore the malaise of "irresponsible image-peddling, the excesses of metaphoristics" [25] (Tret'iakov), and welcome "the decomposition of the plot"[26] (Osip Brik), "the de-novelization of the material"[27] (Viktor Shklovskii). Their aim is to produce language as "laconic and businesslike as an operational report"[28]

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22 "… учил журналистике, очерковой работе неустанно, живо и интересно." Shalamov, "Dvadtsatye gody" [The 1920s], ibid., 344.

23 "… литературу праздной выдумки, преподносимой под флагом заповедного и раз навсегда мистически предначертанного 'художества'." *Literatura fakta: pervyi sbornik materialov rabotnikov Lefa* [The Literature of Fact: First Collection of Materials by Members of *LEF*], ed. Nikolai Chuzhak and Osip Brik (Moscow: 1929), 5. Pagination follows the online edition at: http://teatr-lib.ru/Library/Lef/fact/.

24 "… литература документа-факта," "литературу не наивного и лживого правдоподобия, а самой всамделишной и максимально точно высказанной правды." Ibid., 5.

25 Ibid., 281–282.

26 "Разложение сюжета," ibid., 226.

27 "разроманивание материала," ibid., 233.

28 "лаконичен и деловит, как оперативная сводка," ibid., 275.

(Teodor Grits). Even the clipped, pugnacious manner of many of these sallies is reminiscent of Shalamov's own much later scathing dismissal of belletristic convention, ornamentalism, artificially rounded and finished plots, "bloated, garrulous descriptiveness"[29]—all in the name of terse, "documentary" simplicity.

However, we should be extremely wary of presenting Shalamov's polemical utterances and literary experiments of the 1930s or 1950s as nailing his colors to the mast of the "Factographic School" of the 1920s. Much speaks against any such continuity. As a poet to his roots, Shalamov was unlikely ever to accept the anti-aesthetic, anti-poetic extremes espoused by Tret'iakov; indeed, he quickly became disillusioned with what he saw as Tret'iakov's narrow dogmatism. In the 1930s, Shalamov's own journalistic experience left him with a low regard for that trade as a whole. ("A writer is a judge of time. A journalist, a newspaper man is merely the politicians' minion."[30]) When it came to his own stories, Shalamov in later years was at pains to distance them from the genre of sketch (*ocherk*), so beloved of the *LEF* theoreticians. Though hostile to overt didacticism in literature, he was deeply concerned with its essential moral purpose, too much so to be satisfied with the glib political optimism of the 1920s. By 1971, in the essay "O moei proze" (About My Prose), Shalamov categorically dissociates his own "new prose" and advocacy of the document as lived experience from Tret'iakov's journalistic fact-gathering: "A fact," Shalamov declared, "cannot exist independently of its exposition, of the form in which it is fixed."[31] He had, he claimed, long ago freed himself from "the spiritual yoke of 'literary facts."[32]

What justifies raising the slogans of the factographic school at all is their part in the background to Shalamov's prose fiction of the 1930s—a far more intriguing "missing link" than the smoldering ashes of his verse and the scores if not hundreds of pieces he produced in the sweat of his journalistic brow. While remaining true to his calling as poet, Shalamov had been increasingly drawn in the 1930s to short-story writing and by the time of his second arrest had accumulated a significant number of finished works. Even if, for caution's

29 "Пухлая, многословная описательность." Shalamov, "O proze" [On Prose], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, 145.

30 "Писатель – судья времени. Газетчик, журналист – только подручный политиков." Shalamov, "M. A. Bliumenfel'd" [M. A. Blumenfeld], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 4, 253.

31 "Нет никакого факта без его изложения, без формы его фиксации." Varlam Shalamov, "O moei proze" [On My Prose], *Sobranie sochinenii v chetyrekh tomakh* [Collected Works in Four Volumes] (Moscow: 1998), vol. 4, 376.

32 Shalamov, "Moia zhizn'," 306.

sake, we were to halve his estimate of approximately one hundred completed stories, the remainder still suggests no mean apprenticeship in the genre. That he managed to have four of them published in the Soviet press during the 1930s testifies to their professional competence as well as their orthodoxy. Of those, the best-known, "Tri smerti doktora Austino" (The Three Deaths of Dr Austino), came out in the major journal *Oktiabr'* (October) in 1936, while "Pava i drevo" (Peacock and Tree) actually appeared in *Literaturnyi sovremennik* (Literary Contemporary) after Shalamov's arrest in 1937. Up to that date, he had entertained high hopes that the published verse collection he dreamt of might soon be complemented by a volume of short prose. But, as so often with Shalamov's biography, our prospects of sampling the range of his achievement at this stage in his development are severely limited.

> My wife preserved what had been published and destroyed everything in manuscript form… A hundred stories vanished. All the crap assembled in the *Oktiabr'* file survived, but a hundred unpublished stories (on a par with "Dr Austino")—just vanished.
>
> Жена сохранила напечатанное и уничтожила все написанное… Сто рассказов исчезли. Дерьмо, которое было сосредоточено в архиве «Октября», сохранилось, а сто неопубликованных рассказов (вроде «Доктора Аустино») исчезли.[33]

In fact, at least five of Shalamov's unpublished stories from the 1930s escaped the flames of the family stove, in addition to the four published contemporaneously. These nine stories hardly constitute an *embarras de richesses*, and Shalamov's own opinion of their quality is frequently discouraging. On one occasion he writes: "I don't miss these stories … I found the manuscript of one of these old stories not long ago. It's bad, characterless,"[34] while another, "Pava i drevo" ("Peacock and Tree") he found "naïve and simplistic."[35] A year after beginning work on the *Kolyma Stories*, he re-read those of the 1930s "with utter disgust." "That's not the way I should have written or what I should have

33 "Bol'shie pozhary," 557. Elsewhere, he speaks of having written 150 unused plots for stories by the time of his arrest. "Moia zhizn'," 307.

34 "Рассказов я не жалею, … нашел недавно рукопись одного из этих старых рассказов. Он плох, безличен." Shalamov, Letter to L. I. Skorino, January 12, 1962, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 6, 324.

35 "простенький, наивный," ibid.

written about."[36] Nevertheless, they inevitably loom large in the search for affinities and departures on the road to the *Kolyma Stories*.[37]

Shalamov's stories of the 1930s, to the extent that they survive, are very much of their time and place. "Na zavode" (In the Factory) sees him paying his dues to the "golden autumn" of 1935, when previous production records tumbled in a frenzy of Stakhanovite emulation. The theme of changing generations with the thrusting, principled forces of the young and new, shaming or winning over the recalcitrant old is found in "Peacock and Tree" and again in "Karta" (The Map). The rise of fascism looms large, be it in Spain or Germany, and the sadistic French Colonel de la Roque in "Gospodin Berzhere v bol'nitse" (M Bergeret in Hospital), appears to be based on the real-life French leader of the right-wing League of the Fiery Cross in the mid-1930s. Belgian colonialists and American militarists help swell the cast of malevolent adversaries. Meanwhile, the staunchly left-leaning heroes and heroines are hounded, beaten, jailed, even executed. It is here that some have detected traces of Shalamov's experience in Vishera during his first sentence or an anticipation of the achievements of the Kolyma stories. For example, in "Tri smerti doktora Austino" (The Three Deaths of Dr Austino), Evgenii Shklovskii found that "despite its romantically heightened tone, the late Shalamov shows through more or less clearly."[38] Of course, a story about the last hours of a principled and humane prisoner, whose hopes of pardon are raised by his brutal jailers, only to be finally dashed, can hardly fail to suggest to an informed reader the experiences of Shalamov himself. And one might add that beatings occur not only in Dr Austino's prison. In the story "M Bergeret in Hospital" a girl is punched in the face with a knuckle-duster, while in Shalamov's first-ever published story "Gans" (Hans), the charming eponymous Nazi dupes an escaped communist activist, Margareta, and lures her back across the frontier into Germany, where under interrogation, he threatens her with gang rape if she does not betray her comrades. Beatings had not been unknown in Vishera (though Shalamov saw mercifully little in the way of bloody reprisals during his first sentence there), but it would in any case be naive to suppose that an author's experience is primarily reflected in blunt thematic correspondences. The Shalamov of the

36 "с крайним отвращением … Не так, не это, не об этом надо было мне писать." Shalamov, Letter to A. Z. Dobrovol'skii, March 12, 1955, ibid., 109.

37 First published together in 2007, in *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, 9–27 and 29–44, with notes on 858–859.

38 "… несмотря на романтическую приподнятость тона, уже более или менее ясно проступает поздний Шаламов." E. A. Shklovskii, *Varlam Shalamov*, "Znanie," Series Literatura, no. 9 (Moscow: 1991), 23.

post-Vishera period may, perhaps, sooner be intuited in the recurring motifs of deceit, treachery, and loss—in the grimaces of a malevolent fate which hang over many of his early stories.

The surviving stories confirm that Shalamov was also experimenting with form and manner. "Hans," for example, is written entirely in dialog, with the speakers identifiable only by intrinsic evidence. The title of "V zerkale" (In a Mirror) promises a play with perspective, which duly makes its appearance. Dramatic peripeteias are everywhere to be found. Among the most memorable of the stories is "Vtoraia rapsodiia Lista" (Liszt's Rapsody No. 2), which opens with a quirkily grotesque provincial anecdote, immediately reminiscent of Boris Pil'niak's stories of the 1920s.

> The town did not have its own lunatic. For ten years this established town office had been filled by the louse-ridden bell-ringer Kuzia. One day the bell-ringer's son drowned and from that day on Kuzia regarded water as something spewed up by the devil. He refused to wash and gave the river a wide berth.
>
> В городе не было своего сумасшедшего. Эту штатную городскую вакансию 10 лет занимал вшивый звонарь Кузя. Когда-то у звонаря утонул сын, и с тех пор Кузя считал воду – блевотиной дьявола. Он отказался от мытья и не ходил в Заречье.[39]

In contrast to Isaak Babel', who earns Shalamov's opprobrium for the contrived ornamentalism and imported French short-windedness of his short stories, Pil'niak's efforts to continue Andrei Belyi's innovations in prose rhythm inspire Shalamov's respect. In 1962 he acknowledges that Pil'niak, too, "sought new paths for a new prose," while adding that he *found* but few.[40]

Intriguing are those moments when the predominantly dismissive attitude of the author of *Kolyma Stories* towards his pre-Kolyma efforts in the genre gives way to a tentative, almost wistful claim to continuity of aspiration and attainment. "My powers were growing,"[41] he writes of the 1930s. "It seemed to me that by constantly working away at these stories I had begun to get somewhere."[42] Shalamov even claimed that, by the early 1930s, intense reflection on the short story had taught him "to understand why the rain is necessary in

39 Shalamov, "Vtoraia rapsodiia Lista" [Liszt's Rapsody No. 2], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, 34.
40 Shalamov, "Dvadtsatye gody," 331.
41 Shalamov, "Moia zhizn'," 308.
42 Shalamov, "Moskva 30-kh godov," 438.

Maupassant's 'Mademoiselle Fifi'."[43] Assuming that this is an accurate recollection, it offers a significant early example of his sense of initiation into the esoteric secrets of artistic form as manifest not just in poetry, but in prose as well. A brief passage in a letter from 1962 recognizes the hackneyed features of his anti-fascist, anti-imperialist stories of the thirties, while simultaneously asserting that the impulse behind them, even then, had been "a passionate desire to express this theme in a way that was condensed, laconic, well-plotted."[44] Even the "utter disgust" aroused by re-reading his published stories of the 1930s prompted, in a letter of 1955, one of Shalamov's earliest summaries of what his prose ought to be:

> No surprise endings, no fireworks. An economical, condensed turn of phrase, no metaphors, a simple, brief, literate exposition of the action … And one or two details sprinkled into the story—details, shown in close-up. Fresh details that no one has ever shown before.
>
> Никаких неожиданных концов, никаких фейерверков. Экономная, сжатая фраза без метафор, простое грамотное короткое изложение действия … И одна-две детали, вкрапленные в рассказ – детали, данные крупным планом. Детали новые, не показанные еще никем.[45]

In future, oft-cited essays Shalamov would elaborate upon this early recipe for an ideal short story. He had returned to prose in 1954—a witness in fierce pursuit of veracity and immediacy. His earlier literary biography and momentum had been interrupted to the point of severance, his literary experiments reduced to ashes. Yet already as the *Kolyma Stories* loomed, Shalamov was firmly immersed in the poet's laconicism and obsessive search for the authentic word. Groping his way now, less intuitively than with verse, towards a prose that would not cheapen its truths into belles-lettres, he seems at times to revisit and rework the slogans of a distant literary polemic, at times to draw lessons and deterrent examples from his own jejune stories of the 1930s. Such tentative antecedents and contexts may adumbrate the achievement of the *Kolyma Stories*, but offer few keys to its understanding. As Elena Volkova

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43 "понимать, зачем нужен дождь в рассказе 'Мадмуазель Фифи' Мопассана." Shalamov, "Moia zhizn'," 307.

44 "страстное желание выразить эту тему сжато, лаконично, сюжетно." Shalamov, Letter to L. I. Skorino, January 12, 1962, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 6, 324.

45 Shalamov, Letter to Dobrovol'skii, March 12, 1955, ibid., 109. Shalamov's reference to fresh, unnoticed details is reminiscent of his description of his own poetry in "Koe-chto o moikh stikhakh," 110.

recognized in 1997, Shalamov's stories are not reducible to historical, moral testimony or the championing of fact over literariness. They constitute a generic phenomenon of the utmost complexity. The essence of *that* Shalamov, she wrote, is

> …style, a unique prose rhythm, an innovative conception of the novella-form, all-pervading paradoxicality, ambivalent symbolism, a dazzling command of the word in its semantic and acoustic manifestations, even in its descriptive configuration, precise and tested composition combined with variability, the refined strategy of a master coupled with the spontaneity of a poet groping after "imagination's darting shadow."[46]

> [Шаламов—это] стиль, уникальная ритмика прозы, новаторская новеллистичность, всепроникающая парадоксальность, амбивалентная символика, блестящее владение словом в его смысловом, звуковом облике и даже в начертательной конфигурации, композиционная выверенность в сочетании с вариативностью, тонкая стратегия мастера и спонтанность ловящего «стремительную тень воображенья» поэта.

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich

If the links between the somber edifice of Shalamov's *Kolyma Stories* and his earlier literary pursuits can seem at times to hang disconnected, like the bridges in Piranesi's subterranean *Carceri*, the roots of Solzhenitsyn's story of the simple peasant-zek Ivan Denisovich can, for various reasons, be traced in his life and literature with greater confidence. Solzhenitsyn himself was under no illusion that his eleven years of captivity and exile within the Gulag system could begin to match the enormity and extent of what Shalamov had gone through in Kolyma, and the relevant lines from *The Gulag Archipelago* are well-known:

> Shalamov's labor camp experience was both longer and more bitter than my own, and I respectfully acknowledge that it fell to his lot and not to

46 Elena Volkova, "Varlam Shalamov: Poedinok slova s absurdom" [Varlam Shalamov: A Duel between the Word and the Absurd], *Voprosy literatury*, no. 6 (1997), 4, later incorporated into her book *Tragicheskii paradoks Varlama Shalamova* [The Tragic Paradox of Varlam Shalamov] (Moscow: 1998), 6. Volkova is quoting from Shalamov's poem "Kak Arkhimed" [Like Archimedes].

> mine to touch the lowest depths of brutishness and despair, to which the very nature of camp life was dragging us down.[47]

That difference in severity and duration of captivity strikingly affects any comparison of the two writers' literary output during the time they were serving their respective sentences. However, when it comes to the very different fate of their early writings *before* their decisive arrests, we find that Solzhenitsyn's biography, far from being sheltered, is rich in the kind of dislocations that could be expected to imperil the preservation of both juvenilia and later manuscripts. He was born when the Revolution had just marked its first anniversary; and, for all the efforts of his widowed mother, his provincial upbringing in Kislovodsk and Rostov, in housing makeshift or nomadic, was fraught with the privations and uncertainties of the time. After university, the War and military service kept Solzhenitsyn on the move, and it was while he was at the front that he was first arrested in 1945. Eight years of imprisonment, some of it at hard labor in Ekibastuz and other camps, were followed seamlessly by "eternal" exile, which took him to a remote corner of Kazakhstan and the beginnings of his treatment for cancer. In the intervening years, his mother had died, his marriage had disintegrated, and it was not until "eternity" was curtailed by fiat during the Khrushchev Thaw that he could move to the relative security and stability of Riazan'. There, in 1959, he began surreptitiously writing "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich," developing an idea that had come to him in Ekibastuz Camp. The pressure throughout those underground years to burn any drafts and superseded redactions that could not be securely concealed made for a meagre literary archive. Analogous constraints continued through and beyond Solzhenitsyn's brief interval of celebrity in the early 1960s and into his years as "unperson," target of a failed KGB assassination attempt, arrestee once again, forcible deportee, and exile.

Against this precarious background, the range and volume of Solzhenitsyn's surviving manuscripts and typescripts from the late 1920s through childhood, university, and wartime years is simply extraordinary. Under various constellations of circumstance, relatives, friends, and acquaintances of Solzhenitsyn, far from burning the writings entrusted to them (as so often befell Shalamov), preserved and eventually returned sufficient even of his deeper literary past

47 "Лагерный опыт Шаламова был горше и дольше моего, и я с уважением признаю, что именно ему, а не мне досталось коснуться того дна озверения и отчаяния, к которому тянул нас весь лагерный быт." Solzhenitsyn, *Arkhipelag Gulag* [The Gulag Archipelago], in Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh* [Collected Works in Thirty Volumes], vol. 5 (Moscow: 2006), 169.

to afford a substantial overview of the genres and works at which he tried his hand in childhood and youth. They begin in 1929 with his schoolboy imitations of literary journals, which he produced in a single handwritten copy from the age of ten. Many children do the same. Few persevere for 16 issues as Solzhenitsyn did, suspending "publication" of his *xx vek* (20th Century) only to replace it with a successor (modestly entitled, after the organ of the Soviet Writers' Union)—*Literaturnaia gazeta*. One of several surviving issues captures something of this energetic literary play-acting: an announcement of the imminent serialization in 54 chapters of *Poslednii pirat* (Last of the Pirates), by the journal's principal (sole) contributor of adventure stories, Sania Solzhenitsyn, prompts a stern letter from his editorial alter ego. The editorial board exhorts its fickle author "not to move on to new plots, but to concentrate on finishing the old ones."[48]

Such early examples illustrate little more than the tenaciousness and longevity of the young Solzhenitsyn's urge to become a writer. Indeed, his older self would be consistently dismissive of this "youthful nonsense"[49] and repelled by the image of any established writer simpering over his own gauche efforts of yesteryear. Solzhenitsyn firmly ruled out publication, and at the time of writing, these materials were not generally accessible, which makes for a certain amount of shadow-boxing when arguing for their significance. Nevertheless, access was granted to two biographers, who made use of them in their books;[50] and two exhibitions of Solzhenitsyn's manuscripts and memorabilia have yielded generously illustrated and annotated catalogues–a significant glimpse of what the archive has to offer, albeit far short of integral publication of individual early writings.[51]

The archival holdings from the 1930s and 1940s span a range of genres, including a two-act play, at least one prose poem, and Solzhenitsyn's translation of Heine's "Die Lorelei." The mainstream poetic and prose genres are strongly represented. As we shall see, Solzhenitsyn's youthful attempts at civic

48 "… не браться за новые сюжеты, а разработать и докончить по возможности все старые." Unpubl. (Indicates *de visu* acquaintance with an item in Solzhenitsyn's personal archive.)

49 "Я писал много обычного юного вздора." Autobiographical note in *Les Prix Nobel en 1970* (Stockholm: 1979), 131. The comments he wrote on some archival items are brusquer.

50 Michael Scammell, *Solzhenitsyn: A Biography* (New York: 1985); Liudmila Saraskina, *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn* (Moscow: 2008).

51 *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: Iz-pod glyb; Rukopisi, dokumenty, fotografii* [Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: From Under the Rubble: Manuscripts, Documents, Photographs], ed. Natal'ia Solzhenitsyna and Galina Tiurina (Moscow: 2013); *Alexandre Soljenitsyne: Le courage d'écrire*, ed. Georges Nivat (Paris: 2011).

and lyric poems had already been augmented at the end of the 1930s by at least two substantial attempts at longer narrative verse. Meanwhile, in prose, the pirate and science fiction tales of the early 1930s had given way in adolescence to more adult themes in the short *povest'* "Mikhail Snegov," and in stories which, by the outbreak of war, Solzhenitsyn was beginning to submit to established writers for a professional opinion. Furthermore, while studying mathematics at Rostov university, Solzhenitsyn also researched General Samsonov's defeat at Tannenberg in order to draft the earliest chapters of a literary-historical paean to the Revolution, which he conceived in November 1936 and eventually transmuted some 30 years later into *Krasnoe koleso* (The Red Wheel). Serving as an artillery officer in the Red Army he continued, in lulls in the action, to work on new stories, as well as composing a substantial fragment of a long wartime epic *Shestoi kurs* (Sixth-Year Studies) with notes for its continuation. By no means everything was preserved, of course. Prominent among the casualties of his arrest at the front in 1945 was his *Voennyi dnevnik* (Wartime Diary), five notebooks in minute script packed with incidents, conversations and encounters—"a treasure-house," he recalled, "my entire wartime memory," "my claim to have the makings of a writer."[52] These notebooks were confiscated and apparently destroyed in the Lubianka. Although the surviving examples of Solzhenitsyn's actual writing and projects are not yet in the public domain and cannot be discussed in detail here, their chronological and generic range is broad. They furnish a sense of continuity and clues to the direction of Solzhenitsyn's literary development even before his arrest.

If Solzhenitsyn's sentence had made literary composition impossible or had erased the traces of his creative efforts, as Shalamov's largely did, it is conceivable that these early texts might, even so, have shed some distant light on the emergence of "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich" in 1959. As it is, substantial stepping-stones span the intervening decade in camps and exile, for the volume of literary relics even from the Gulag years themselves is once again extraordinarily large. As an example, Solzhenitsyn's first wife, Natal'ia Reshetovskaia, retained the poems that he included in letters to her from the camps, and some of them she later quoted in her several books of memoirs.[53] Again, substantial drafts of a second fictionalized prose-treatment of his war experiences, *Istoriia odnogo diviziona* (History of One Battalion)—written secretly in 1948 under the comparatively lax regime at Marfino Special Technical Prison a

52 "клад," "вся моя военная память," "моя претензия стать писателем." Cit. from Saraskina, *Solzhenitsyn*, 266.

53 E.g. Natal'ia Reshetovskaia, *V kruge vtorom: Otkroveniia pervoi zheny Solzhenitsyna* [In the Second Circle: Revelations of Solzhenitsyn's First Wife] (Moscow: 2006), 78–89.

year before his return to labor camp in the true sense—were smuggled out by a sympathetic free worker and eventually restored to their author. But the most remarkable survival of all was a body of verse, amounting to more than 10,000 lines, created and laboriously memorized in captivity. Apart from individual lyric poems, one complete play in verse, and half of another, it incorporated the long novel in verse *Dorozhen'ka* (The Way), which Solzhenitsyn had begun at Marfino in 1947 and continued in the early 1950s while in labor camp in Northern Kazakhstan.

At the end of Solzhenitsyn's sentence, the transcription and burying of verse-texts memorized inside the camps and the precautionary burning of drafts of his prose in the mid- and late 1950s leave lacunae and uncertainties, but even here there are invaluable survivals. One such is the 1962 "compact" typescript of *V kruge pervom* (The First Circle), which takes us back close to the novel as it existed before Solzhenitsyn began to write "Ivan Denisovich" in 1959.[54] Thus, with all due caution, we may detect a trail of literary circumstance and evidence leading from childhood up to Solzhenitsyn's breakthrough with "Ivan Denisovich" and far exceeding anything that could reasonably have been expected to outlive his turbulent biography.

It remains to relate some of this archival profile to the emergence of "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich"—a story whose deep roots were initially obscured by its sensational reception in the context of Khrushchev's de-Stalinizing disclosures. As a preliminary generalization, the predominant bulk of Solzhenitsyn's writings, as schoolboy, student, officer, *zek*, whether in verse or in prose, was narrative or dramatic in form. Furthermore, whereas Shalamov went to Kolyma with some published stories under his belt, but remained a poet to his very roots, Solzhenitsyn found himself in Ekibastuz as a frustrated prose-writer who was forced back upon verse in order to retain whatever he could compose. If we look back to his notebooks for 1937 and 1938, when his idea for a historical novel about the revolution was already germinating, we find him applying himself seriously to verse, sufficiently at least to complete a *poema* of almost 250 lines devoted to and named for an idol of his youth, Évariste Galois.[55] Galois (1811–32) was a brilliant French mathematician and passionate revolutionary, whom we see scribbling down his last theorems and ideas on the night before the duel that will snuff out his life and genius before his 21st birthday. Solzhenitsyn shared Galois's love of mathematics and revolutionary ardor, had lost his own father even before his own birth, and

54 Illustration and facsimile pages in *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: Iz-pod glyb*, 188–191.

55 Partial facsimile, ibid., 77.

expected to emulate Pushkin and Lermontov at least in short-livedness. The *poema* is accordingly florid and highly romantic, and Solzhenitsyn's identification with his hero complete. Galois falls "an impotent victim of malevolent fate,"

> As fell in those years at the hands of the tyrant
> The two finest poets of far-away Russia.[56]

More striking in their potential are four draft chapters of a much longer work in verse, contained in the same notebook. They are part of the preparatory materials for a verse-*povest'* entitled *Lastochka* (The Swallow), conceived in ten or more chapters. This exotic "nested" tale of maritime travel and *grande amour* in the East is framed within the earthbound setting of an NKVD interrogation room, which ominously reunites two long-separated school-friends—one the hero of the embedded narrative, now a prisoner under interrogation, the other an investigator assigned to his case. Solzhenitsyn's groundwork included, as the manuscript shows, tabulating and counting his own rhymes to avoid weary repetition of like verbal endings. He not only pored over Leonid Timofeev's 1939 *Teoriia stikha* (*Theory of Verse*), but together with a close friend submitted verses to the author himself. Timofeev's devastating evaluation came as a "dismal blow" to their literary ambitions.[57] Before encountering these student experiments in longer verse at Troitse-Lykovo in 2007, I had not even been aware of their existence. Whatever their limitations, they help explain not only why Solzhenitsyn discontinued his project, but also how, from a practical point of view, he could even contemplate composing in verse on the scale he did while a prisoner in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

For now, and during the war a few years later, the preponderance clearly lay with prose. True, Solzhenitsyn ruefully recalls how on one occasion a fellow officer with literary tastes "gnawed and ground away at my war poetry," but the same critic, he added, also "made mincemeat of my story, 'The Lieutenant'."[58] It was *stories*, seven in all, that Solzhenitsyn submitted for appraisal to Konstantin Fedin and Boris Lavrenev—one batch in 1941, another in 1943. (All or most survive.) As a serving officer Solzhenitsyn had noted the genuine popularity among his troops of two works—Tolstoi's *War and Peace* and Aleksandr

56 "Как пали в те годы от руки тирании/ Два лучших поэта далекой России."

57 "мрачный удар." Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Skvoz' chad* [Through Smoke and Fumes] (Paris: 1979), 43.

58 "… в пух и прах разбил моего 'Лейтенанта' … Мои военные стихи изгрыз и источил." Saraskina, *Solzhenitsyn*, 220.

Tvardovsky's uniquely truthful long *poema*, *Vasilii Terkin*. The example of *Vasilii Terkin* would soon become highly pertinent to the technical challenge of creating verse suitable for long-term retention in the camps. But Solzhenitsyn's literary efforts in these years at liberty seemed to be gravitating towards prose, not least of a Tolstoyan epic hue. His own embryonic epos did not fade from his mind. Though he had neither the sources nor the time to pursue historical fiction at the front, he longed to do so; and by 1944 its contours had swollen, in his mind, to the proportions of a pentalogy.

After his arrest Solzhenitsyn had a last chance to compose in prose in Marfino Special Prison in 1948–49 before his transfer to what was euphemistically termed "general labor" (*obshchie raboty*) at Ekibastuz. There the narrative impulse came up against ineluctable mnemonic necessity and steered him towards his genre. As he later wrote:

> Memory is the sole hiding-place where we can keep what we have written and carry it through searches and transportation to other camps. At first I had little faith in what memory could achieve and that is why I decided to write in verse. *Of course, this meant doing violence to the genre*. Later I discovered that prose, too, lends itself quite well to being packed deep down in the secret compartments of our heads.
>
> Память – это единственная заначка, где можно держать написанное, где можно проносить его сквозь обыски и этапы. Поначалу я мало верил в возможности памяти и потому решил писать стихами. Это было, конечно, насилие над жанром. Позже я обнаружил, что и проза неплохо утолакивается в тайные глубины того, что мы носим в голове.[59]

Solzhenitsyn's attitude towards the thousands of lines of verse drama, narrative and lyric poetry that he brought out of the camps was ambivalent. He did in 1965 argue cautiously against Shalamov's views and for the legitimate coexistence of a humbler, more direct form of poetic expression alongside the finely nuanced, polysemantic, symbolic achievements of "great, refined, true poetry."[60] But creating verse in the camps had, of course, been a question of survival and necessity, rather than of poetics. Ekibastuz was no Kolyma. A sentence such as Shalamov's would inevitably have frustrated the best of efforts.

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59 Solzhenitsyn, *Arkhipelag Gulag*, in *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 6, 93. Emphasis added.

60 See my "Shalamov v spore o lagernoi poezii" [Shalamov in Dispute over Labor-Camp Verse], *IV mezhdunarodnye shalamovskie chteniia*, especially 112.

But the task Solzhenitsyn set himself was more than enough to fill his horizon for the next three years at hard labor; and even with a well-trained, unusually capacious memory, he struggled, sometimes near despair, to retain his verse compositions. (Pushkin's line "God grant I do not lose my mind!" features as one of his refrains.[61]) By the time of his release from camp, simply recalling and mentally reciting thousands of verses with the aid of a home-made rosary consumed every spare minute for half of each month. Solzhenitsyn cherished his long poem as a delicate child,[62] a rare survivor amongst countless doomed attempts to wrest creative permanence from the grinding degeneration of camp life. ("The dripping of fragrant resin in a chopped-down forest."[63]) Only after his release could he move to a more sober appraisal of its merits as poetry, and by the early 1960s poets such as Aleksandr Tvardovsky and Anna Akhmatova had confirmed to him that he should expect no acclaim for his verse. Accordingly, he forbore from publishing *The Way* and his shorter lyrics for almost 50 years. He was over 80 by the time they saw the light of day.[64]

As for his own generic re-orientation towards prose, that came, as if intuitively, the moment he left labor camp for exile in 1953. Once his mass of memorized verse was safely written down and buried near his hut in the Kazakh village of Kok-Terek, Solzhenitsyn set about completing in prose the drama *Captives*, begun in verse in the camp, and then wrote a new play entirely in prose, *Respublika truda* (Republic of Labour). By the end of that first year of exile, he had ceased to compose verse altogether, be it lyric or narrative. His next new work—delayed by cancer treatment until 1955—would be the long novel, *V kruge pervom* (The First Circle). For all these reasons, the *zek*-author of *The Way*, the labor-camp plays in verse, even the lyric poems of camp and early exile—may be seen as a poet *malgré soi*.

The constrained use of verse over several years, its sudden release from memory to page, its clandestine storage, coupled with the author's cessation of poetic composition—all have preservative properties that are of assistance in dating variants. The later Solzhenitsyn was free in principle to select, withhold, or even tinker with portions of his camp poetry, and that did happen in

61 "Не дай мне Бог сойти с ума!" Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Proterevshi glaza* [Rubbing One's Eyes] (Moscow: 1999), 100–101.

62 The poem of 1953 "Nad 'Dorozhen'koi'" [Contemplating *The Way*] opens with the address "Дочь моя! Душа моя!" [Daughter dear! My very Soul!] Ibid., 206.

63 "Накап смолы душистой в срубленном лесу." Ibid., 100.

64 He did re-appropriate by publication those fragments confiscated and used against him by the KGB. The rest eventually appeared in 1999 in his *Proterevshi glaza*. A prefatory note refers to them as "my breath and my life" [моим дыханием и жизнью] in those years (see p. 3).

the few instances of publication—but, after years of prose-writing, it would have involved considerable effort to re-engage in a fundamental way with the rhymed syllabo-tonic verse of his long discontinued poetic oeuvre. There appears to be no evidence of any such substantial reworking in later years. This is helpful as we draw nearer to the writing of "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich." If we broadly accept that the course of Solzhenitsyn's literary development is, from at least the late 1940s, that of a would-be prose writer, channeled in the years of his sentence through mainly narrative verse, then some other generalizations are possible. The first is that in captivity there is a shift in his artistic chronotope which is discernible across all genres; the second, that the labor-camp poetry in particular records if not a ferment, then a range of warring personal and thematic impulses. Both of these contentions bear upon the imminent birth of "Ivan Denisovich."[65]

By his teenage years in the 1930s, with his Christian upbringing long ousted by Young Pioneer ardor, Solzhenitsyn could be expected to orient his writing to the radiant Communist goal, to optimism and energy, and, indeed, he did so. Though he was no stranger to the romanticism and emotional masochism of the 16-year-old male adolescent, his stories tend to end with the hero fighting his way back from adversity and despair. In one of them, "strength of will, allied to optimism, his constant companion,"[66] ensures that faith in life duly triumphs. Another unpublished story of the mid-1930s ends with an allegorical Train of Life, racing across the steppes, in "ceaseless, stubborn motion,"[67] slicing through the miseries and tribulations of existence, while its pounding wheels beat out the slogan:

> – "Onwards!.. Onwards!.."
> On towards the Goal!!!"[68]

This teleological impulse and life-asserting optimism were, of course, much in currency in the 1930s, and Solzhenitsyn's grander designs tended to reflect this. His nascent historical epic was intended to commemorate the Revolution Triumphant; his war-time project *Sixth-Year Studies* followed two fellow-students

65 Maikl Nikolson [Michael Nicholson], "'Ivan Denisovich': Mify proiskhozhdeniia" ["Ivan Denisovich": Myths of Origin], in *"Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha" A.I. Solzhenitsyna: khudozhestvennyi mir, poetika, kul'turnyi kontekst*, ed. A.V. Urmanov (Blagoveshchensk: 2003), 3–36.

66 "Но сила воли в союзе с оптимизмом, вечным спутником Михаила Снегова решили." "Mikhail Snegov" (1934), variously described as a short story and a *povest'*. Unpubl.

67 "Rasskaz v temnote" [A Tale Told in the Dark] (1934). Unpubl.

68 " – Вперед!.. Вперед!.. / К Цели!!!"

now at the front as they moved with the advancing Soviet forces towards immediate victory, beyond which beckoned the final triumph of world communism. Such an autobiographical narrative, linear in time, mobile in space, is glimpsed for the last time at Marfino prison in 1948 in the completed chapters and broader design of *History of One Battalion*. But neither chance nor the downgrading of the war-theme in his thematic priorities can fully explain why Solzhenitsyn's attempts to complete that work after his release came to nothing. The fact is that the intervening years of captivity had seen a fundamental shift in his whole approach to the representation of both history and story. Onward-rolling, forward-thrusting narratives had lost their attraction for him. In Ekibastuz the viewpoint of *The Way* becomes retrospective. The clichés of the Soviet Highway of Enthusiasts (*Shosse entuziastov*), the shimmering goals and radiant futures, give way to a humbler path through life, winding, deceptive—no exhilarating Tolstoian *roman-fleuve*, more a loose chain of episodes marked by naive arrogance, political myopia, unwitting complicity in evil, all viewed now from the vantage point of bitter experience. Time contracts, reflecting the literal enclosures of incarceration and the vanished hopes and impenetrable future of the *zek*'s life, but also nudging the would-be writer towards the constraints of drama. Both verse plays that he brought out of Ekibastuz in his head observe the unity of time, spanning but a single day.[69] The germ of an idea for a story dramatizing one day as experienced by an ordinary *zek* sprang up at about the same time, although it was not until some seven years later that it would yield the tale of Ivan Denisovich's day. When Solzhenitsyn resumes long prose in the mid-1950s, after his release into exile and his hospitalization with cancer, there persists a clear urge to restrain the epic forward motion of his narratives.[70] Drawing on the three years of his confinement in the Marfino Special Technical Prison, he restricts the narrative present of his long novel *The First Circle* to barely three *days*, expanding it laterally, rather than in a linear direction, exploring separate encapsulated worlds that offer cognate or antithetical perspectives. The dominant first-person narrator of the inchoate wartime project *Sixth-Year Studies*, an amiable companion but also a focused participant in a lucid historical process, does not recur. The still prominent hero of Solzhenitsyn's first play in the camps gives way to a gallery of cellmates in the second. It thus adumbrates the pattern of multiple rival perspectives in *The First Circle*: there Gleb Nerzhin must jostle for center-stage

69 *Pir pobeditelei* [Feast of the Victors] and *Plenniki* [Captives].

70 It would lead to the imposition of a bipartite structure upon the narrative present of his *Cancer Ward* and the drastic segmentation of the course of history into "nodes" (*uzly*) in *The Red Wheel*.

with a large cast of major secondary figures. Individual chapters favor different viewpoints. Ivan Denisovich's quasi-direct discourse will soon carve out a single distinct, non-authorial voice from the chorus in a story and a day of his own.

Behind these formal preferences lies not simply the raw shock of incarceration, but a discernible oscillation between impulses towards self-control and relative unrestraint. A different, personal, and thematic perspective directly relevant to the origins of "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich" is preserved in the verse of camps and exile. To explore it, as he once stated in a letter, was to trace his "*origins*—my camp verse, from which everything else derives, and I myself derive."[71] This is a strikingly sweeping statement. What were those roots, those sources? There in the early 1950s—long before "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich" was written, published and swiftly misapprehended as Solzhenitsyn's "starting point"—we see already at work features which commentators would regularly ascribe to a "late" Solzhenitsyn. He is reproached for turning away from the initial simplicity and laconicism of "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich" and increasingly embracing longer forms, heavy symbolism, thinly disguised didacticism, mystical, nationalistic-patriotic, anti-socialist sympathies, etc. The camp verse tells a different and much more interesting story. Here we trace in fragments the resurgence within Solzhenitsyn of a dichotomy in his childhood, which the camps clarified for him:

> Troubled and torn between truths, I grew up,
> Face flushed with flames, yet with icon lamp's pallor.[72]

In the 1930s the pale icon lamp of his childhood Christianity could not withstand the blazing campfires, revolutionary slogans, and pounding drumbeat of Young Pioneer certainties. In his late teens, Solzhenitsyn's adulation of Boris Lavrenev, doyen of Soviet revolutionary romanticism, prompted a title for his planned historical epic "Love the Revolution." As a student Solzhenitsyn experienced an intoxication with Marx and Engels that he himself insists was genuine, passionate, and of several years' duration. His urge to die in furtherance of Leninist world revolution was unfeigned. "If Lenin's cause should

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71 "[проследили] *истоки* – мои лагерные стихи, откуда вытекает и всё, и я сам." Solzhenitsyn, Letter to me, May 1, 2003.

72 "Жарко-костровый, бледно-лампадный, / Рос я запутанный, трудный, двуправдный." Solzhenitsyn, *Dorozhen'ka* [The Way], in *Proterevshi glaza*, 30.

perish in these days / What good to me is life itself?"[73] he wrote in 1941, and the year before (while on his honeymoon!) he produced a kind of exultant *Ave Lenin, nos morituri te salutamus*:

> We shall die!! And o'er our bodies
> Revolution shall arise!!!
> From October's [swirling] blizzard
> Our generation has arrived.
> And for the world to sing and flourish,
> *They* must now lay down their lives…
>
> Мы – умрём!! По нашим трупам
> Революция взойдёт!!!
> Из Октябрьской метели
> Поколение пришло.
> Чтоб потом цвели и пели,
> Надо, чтоб оно – легло…[74]

By contrast, in the camp verse, we find over several years not a smooth development so much as a jumble of contradictory impulses within Solzhenitsyn the *zek* in the decade before "Ivan Denisovich" was first written. They include notes of passivity and quietism. As early as 1946, he had written of escaping to some simple, rural backwater in the mountains of Altai: "I've paid my due to lofty strivings, and that's enough of it," he writes.[75] By 1950, distinct religious tones are to be found. Solzhenitsyn writes of cultivating a new soul amidst the evil and corruption of the prison and declares himself content with this tender plant.[76] Within a year, recalling how he had returned to Russia from East Prussia under arrest in 1945, he mingles a sense of Christian penitence with reverence for a de-ideologized image of Russia:

> O Lord, Who has created
> The oceans' mirror and dry land!
> Perhaps there is yet time for me
> To make myself a worthy man?

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73 "Если Ленина дело падет в эти дни, / Для чего мне останется жить?" Cited in *Lyubi revoliutsiiu* [Love the Revolution], ibid., 292 and previously in the unpublished *History of One Battalion*.

74 "Moemu pokoleniiu" [To My Generation]. Cited in *Dorozhen'ka*, 25–26.

75 "Высоким стремленьям / Отдал дань я, и будет с меня." "Mechta arestanta" [The Convict's Dream] (1946), *Proterevshi glaza*, 181.

76 "Otsiuda ne vozvrashchaiutsia" [From Here There's No Returning] (1950), ibid., 187.

O Russia! The life I once lived—
I tremble to call it a life.
Today, when at last I set foot on your soil,
I stand here, renewed and reborn. (1952)

О Боже, о, Ты, Кем созданы
Твердь суши и водная гладь!
Быть может и мне не опоздано
Ещё человеком стать?!

Россия! Не смею жизнию
Я прежнюю звать свою.
Сегодня рождаюсь сызнова
Вот здесь, на твоём краю.[77]

This contemplative manner brings strong confessional intonations, dissatisfaction with himself, especially with his own impatience and anger: "I'm learning to be patient now, I'm learning to be modest."[78] The *zek* has but one fundamental "right":

To be a true unangered son
of Russia's hapless land.[79]

And among these early poems of the Ekibastuz years, close to the time when Ivan Denisovich's matter-of-fact story first began to take shape in his mind, Solzhenitsyn writes lines that seem to bear directly upon its conception:

I'm learning that to curse and yell
Takes precious little art or skill.[80]

The cultivation of self-restraint or the extreme of Christian contemplation, far from being the climax of a steady progression, remain but one impulse and must jostle in Solzhenitsyn's Gulag verse with starkly different motifs. Not only had the idea for Ivan Denisovich's day come to him while working as

77 *Dorozhen'ka*, 172–173.

78 "Я учусь терпенью, я учусь быть скромным." "Otsiuda ne vozvrashchaiutsia," *Proterevshi glaza*, 188.

79 "Быть безгневным сыном / Безудачливой русской земли." "Pravo uznika" [The Prisoner's Right] (1951), ibid., 194.

80 "Узнаю, что клясть, что ненавидеть, / Что кричать—наука не хитра." "Otsiuda ne vozvrashchaiutsia," ibid. 188.

a bricklayer in Ekibastuz, constructing the camp's internal prison, but that same experience inspired the contemporaneous poem "Kamenshchik" (The Bricklayer) (1950), alluding to Briusov's eponymous poem of 1901 and steeped in bitter irony and self-reproach:

> Here am I, a mason.
> Just as the poet told,
> I shape the rough-hewn stone to build our prison wall.

Its lines—right up to the final "Good God above! What slaves we are!"—breathe a spirit of mingled despair and growing resistance.[81] Another poem expresses hostility towards those who have brought Russia so low, contempt for the Writers' Union ("in jester's cap and bells"),[82] mortification that the outside world might judge the spirit of Russia by the institutions that now so crassly misrepresent it. Sustained by Solzhenitsyn's lingering sympathy with generations of Russian revolutionaries, these rebellious sentiments evoke something apparently far removed from Ivan Denisovich's tolerably benign day. The events of the Ekibastuz strike, which Solzhenitsyn witnessed at first hand, and the forty days and bloody suppression of the Kengir camp uprising, would be vividly and unrestrainedly commemorated only months before the writing of "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich," in chapters of *The Gulag Archipelago*, and only weeks after its completion in Solzhenitsyn's literary film scenario *Tanks Know the Truth*. As for his feelings at the time, here is a taste of the most martial of these defiant verses, written in 1951:

> And through a thousand prison degradations
> I feel myself a soldier still.
> And hence my mocking gaze—too soon for rage!—
> Falls on the Cheka guards:
> The hour will come, I'll grasp my gun,
> I'll shout "Hurrah!" and join the charge.
>
> И сквозь тысячи тюремных унижений
> Я солдатом чувствую себя.
> Оттого-то я гляжу с издёвкой

81 "Вот я каменщик. Как у поэта сложено, / Я из камня дикого кладу тюрьму." "Боже мой! Какие мы рабы!" Ibid., 192.

82 "Скоморошьи бубны ССП." "Naputstvie" [Parting Words] (1953), ibid., 209.

На чекистов: гневу не пора.
Будет час! – и я вольюсь с винтовкой
В русское протяжное "ура!"[83]

Thanks to writings that have physically survived in such improbable abundance we can gain a sense of Solzhenitsyn's development that is not restricted to his own later recollections and evaluations. This allows us to trace at least some broad contours spanning the years of captivity and to recognize "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich" not as a guileless literary beginning, but as a specific attempt in the late 1950s to subdue his defiant, accusatory voice in the interests of a conscious experiment in literary restraint. Something of those conflicting impulses would remain within him throughout his life.

Largely by chance, Solzhenitsyn's archival legacy spanned some 80 years of his life. Shalamov's, with minor exceptions—barely 30. It was, in any event, a singular exception for a *zek* to emerge even after a relatively few years at hard labor with his experiences preserved in thousands of lines of verse, be they never so makeshift. Shalamov's sentence was such as to erase all possibility of a comparable outcome. Such differences are felt at every turn. The origins and antecedents of "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich" are more overtly accessible than those of the *Kolyma Stories*. The tale of Ivan Denisovich became encrusted with the myth of its own sensational debut and its dubious identification with an unspoiled, understated Ur-Solzhenitsyn gradually overtaken by a controversial "late" variant of the author.

I have argued that the surviving record throws such generalizations into question, revealing the resonant laconicism and understatement of Ivan Denisovich's story (its enduring achievement) as a hard-won product of demonstrable, long-standing tensions. In Shalamov's case, the literary tributaries nourishing the emergent prose are less discernible, the scant antecedents all the more tantalizing. Yet, the *Kolyma Stories* themselves rear up above the textual wasteland in stark, enigmatic splendor.

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83 "Chto-to stali frontovye vesny…"[Frontline Springtimes Visit Me …] (1951). Ibid., 195.

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CHAPTER 2

Poetry after the Gulag: Do Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov Have a Lyric Mindset?

Ulrich Schmid

1 Introduction

Theodor Adorno's question about whether it is possible "to write poetry after Auschwitz" demands to be posed in Russian. In an often-quoted sentence from 1949, Adorno called the writing of poetry after Auschwitz "barbaric." In two essays from 1962, he explicitly corroborated this statement. In 1966, however, Adorno conceded that the "tortured has the right to scream" and admitted that he may have been wrong not to allow for poetry after Auschwitz.[1] For Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Varlam Shalamov, Auschwitz was undoubtedly a valid metaphor for the Gulag. However, neither author addressed Adorno's problem directly.[2] They instinctively chose poetry in the first place to express their ordeal. Their prose response to the Gulag emerged only later, after their release from the camps.

There are quite substantial differences between Solzhenitsyn's and Shalamov's understanding of poetry. Solzhenitsyn has an old-fashioned taste when it comes to poetry. In 1965, he praised Aleksandr Zhigulin's very traditional poetry about the Gulag experience. In a letter to Zhigulin, Solzhenitsyn complained that most of the Russian poetry of the 20th century is "loud, aims at something, wants to show off, surprise and make a special impression."[3] In another letter to Zhigulin, he identified this tradition with the works of Blok, Akhmatova, Pasternak and Shalamov. For Solzhenitsyn, this was the mainstream:

I am very much indebted to Michael Nicholson for his valuable remarks.

1 *Lyrik nach Auschwitz?Adorno und die Dichter*, ed. Petra Kiedaisch (Stuttgart: 1995).

2 Svetlana Boym, "Banality of Evil, Mimicry, and the Soviet Subject: Varlam Shalamov and Hannah Arendt," in *Slavic Review* 67 (2008), 342–363.

3 "… крикливая, куда-то лезет, хочет как-то изощриться особенно, обязательно поразить и удивить." Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "Dva pis'ma A. Zhigulinu" [Two Letters to A. Zhigulin], in *Za chto? Proza. Poeziia. Dokumenty* [What for? Prose, Poetry, Documents], ed. Vitalii Shentalinskii and Vladimir Leonovich (Moscow: 1999), 233. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

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> From all sides, people tell me, that this is the only true poetry—when words do not even have a direct sense, when transitions are elusive, illogical, when they do not have a logic, but hint at something or insinuate something. I agree—this poetry is great, subtle, elegant, real, I love all of them. But I will never agree that there cannot be another kind of poetry. In my opinion, most of Pushkin's and Lermontov's poetry does not match these criteria, but are they worth any the less for that? I doubt it.
>
> Со всех сторон мне толкуют, что вот это и есть единственная и истинная поэзия – когда слова даже не имеют прямого смысла, когда переходы неуловимы, алогичны, но вдруг на что-то тебе намекают, что-то напевают. Я согласен – поэзия эта великая, тонкая, изящная, настоящая, я их всех очень люблю. И все-таки никогда не соглашусь, что другой поэзии быть не может. По-моему, большинство стихов Пушкина и Лермонтова совершенно не отвечают этим критериям – но ниже ли они? Едва ли.[4]

A late echo of Solzhenitsyn's predilection for what he would probably call classical Russian poetry appears in his critique of Joseph Brodsky. According to Solzhenitsyn, Brodsky's poetry is rife with "cold irony" and lacks "human simplicity" and "spiritual accessibility."[5] Basically, these claims stem from the aesthetic norms of socialist realism.[6]

Shockingly, Solzhenitsyn explains these deficits as due to Brodsky's imperfect moral education in the Soviet penitentiary system. He belittles Brodsky's sentence, calling his five-year forced-labor term (that eventually was reduced to seventeen months' exile to a provincial village) "completely childish." And yet, it is the very poetry that stems from the time of Brodsky's banishment that Solzhenitsyn deems "clearly expressed, with sincere feelings, without any posturing." Solzhenitsyn goes so far as to regret Brodsky's early release from exile, as a longer stay would surely have improved Brodsky's poetry.

Solzhenitsyn consciously sought to continue the tradition of Pushkin and Lermontov in his early poetry. The romantic tone of Lermontov's poetry can

4 Ibid., 232.

5 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "Iosif Brodsky: Izbrannye stikhi" [Joseph Brodsky: Selected Verse], in *Novyi Mir* 12 (1999), accessed August 10, 2018, ⟨magazines.russ.ru/novyi_mi/1999/12/solgen.html⟩.

6 Michael Nicholson, "Solzhenitsyn as 'Socialist Realist'," in *In the Party Spirit*: *Socialist Realism and Literary Practice in the Soviet Union, East Germany and China*, ed. Hilary Chung and Michael Falchikov (Amsterdam: 1996), 55–68.

easily be detected in Solzhenitsyn's two rather pretentious poems, each with the title "Prayer," which mirror Lermontov's famous two "Prayers." Solzhenitsyn's first prayer goes back to the 1960s, the second to the late 1990s. The prayer from 1962 is closely connected to the sensational publication of *Ivan Denisovich* and reflects the romantic concept of the poet's divine inspiration:

> How easy it is to live with You, Lord!
> How easy it is for me to believe in You! [...]
> On the peak of earthly fame
> I look back in wonder at the path
> That led me through hopelessness to this place,
> From where I could send
> The reflection of Your rays to mankind.
>
> Как легко мне жить с Тобой, Господи!
> Как легко мне верить в Тебя! [...]
> На хребте славы земной
> я с удивлением оглядываюсь на тот путь
> через безнадёжность сюда,
> откуда и я смог послать человечеству
> отблеск лучей Твоих.[7]

The second prayer follows quite an anachronistic pattern as well. It echoes Solzhenitsyn's apocalyptic view in *Russia in Collapse* (1998) and reanimates the self-image of a poet who is able to talk directly to God and to convey heavenly messages to his disciples—much in the way Lermontov saw himself:

> All-merciful Father!
> Do not Leave Your dear, long-suffering Russia
> In her dazed and troubled state,
> In all her many wounds,
> Impoverishment
> And spiritual confusion!
>
> Отче наш Все милостивый!
> Россиюшку Твою многострадную

7 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Proza. Literaturnaia kritika. Publitsistika* [Prose, Literary Criticism, Essays] (Moscow: 2004), 227.

не покинь в ошеломлении нынешнем,
в её израненности,
обнищании
и в смутности духа![8]

Even more prominent are the traces left by Pushkin in Solzhenitsyn's lyric production. The future dissident wrote most of his poetry in the early 1950s, when he had not yet reached the limit of Pushkin's lifetime. In a poem addressed to the "Russian Poets!," Solzhenitsyn even pondered whether he could ever survive this limit. Death at the age of 37 seemed to be a prerequisite for every poet who aimed to become the successor of the Russian national poet in the 20th century. And there were quite a few candidates for this honorable office: Maiakovsky, Mandelstam, Evtushenko, and Brodsky vied with Pushkin and aspired to take his place. It is quite telling that Solzhenitsyn enlarged the pinnacle of classic Russian literature to a triumvirate as he would have it in the title of a rather self-indulgent poem from 1953: After finishing his work, the lyric ego trembles not before the judgment of the world, but before the critical reaction of Pushkin, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoi. In terms of genre, it is significant that these three names represent poetry, drama (albeit in a novelistic form), and epic. Solzhenitsyn wishes to be acclaimed by all three masters—which means that he aims to excel in all of the classical literary genres. In fact, Solzhenitsyn's literary œuvre may not be attributed exclusively to one specific genre. His writing synthesizes elements of poetry, drama, and epic. Ultimately, Solzhenitsyn claims to present a hermeneutic key to explain the precarious position of the human being in history, society, culture, church, and the state. As his later biography proves, Solzhenitsyn dedicated his entire creative energy to his literary projects. The largest of them was, of course, the monumental depiction of the Russian tragedy during the early 20th century, published under the title *The Red Wheel*, but other texts, too, eventually acquired epic dimensions.

2 The Synthesis of Literary Genres: Solzhenitsyn

The synthesis of literary genres may already be observed in Solzhenitsyn's early short story "Matriona's Home" which dates back to 1959. The introductory paragraph is composed like a prose poem. In 2000, Solzhenitsyn recorded

8 Ibid., 235f.

his own reading of the short story. In this performance he stressed the poetic dimension of the text.[9] The lyrical structure becomes evident when the first section is broken down into single syntactic units. At the same time this text contains a meta-rhyme of the train, slowing down. The language is clearly rhythmicized; the lines feature assonant rhymes. The text is rich in "instrumentation," as the Russian formalists would have it.[10] The main consonants can be read as a variation on the strange name "Torfoprodukt," where the plot of the story is set. The consonants t, r, f, p, d form a sound pattern that is composed like a fugue.

> One hundred and eighty-four kilometers from Moscow
> on the branch that leads to Murom and Kazan
> trains were still slowing down to a crawl
> a good six months after it happened.
> Passengers stood glued to the windows or went out to stand by the doors.
> Was the line under repair, or what?
> Would the train be late?
> It was all right. Past the crossing, the train
> picked up speed again and the passengers went back to their seats.
> Only the engine drivers knew what it was all about.
> The engine drivers and I.[11]

> На сто восемьдесят четвертом километре от Москвы, (m, k, t, v)
> по ветке, что ведет к Мурому и Казани,
> еще с добрых полгода после того (p, l, d)
> все поезда замедляли свой ход (f)
> почти как бы
> до ощупи.
> Пассажиры льнули к (*extra space*) стеклам, (p, l, m, k, t)
> выходили в тамбур: (f, t)
> чинят пути, что ли? Из графика вышел?
> Нет.
> Пройдя переезд, поезд опять набирал скорость, (p, r, s, m)
> пассажиры усаживались.

9 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "Matrenin dvor," read by the author, accessed August 10, 2018. youtube.com/watch?v=ZRaYxUNBV5U.

10 Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History, Doctrine* (The Hague: 1980), 74.

11 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "Matryona's Home," trans. Harry Willetts, in *Encounter* 5 (1963), 28–45, at 28. The translation was slightly amended by me [U. S.].

Только машинисты знали и помнили, отчего это все.
Да я.[12]

"Matriona's Home" is also a good example of the dramatic dimension of Solzhenitsyn's texts. There are many sections where direct speech dominates the narration.

"Where's the woman of the house?"
"I don't know."
"This is the place the tractor with a sledge came from?"
"This is it."
"Had they been drinking before they left?"
The four of them were looking around them, screwing up their eyes in the dim light from the table-lamp. I realised that they had either made an arrest or wanted to make one.
"What's happened then?"
"Answer the question!"
"But…"
"Were they drunk when they went?"
"Were they drinking here?"[13]

– Где хозяйка?
– Не знаю.
– А трактор с санями из этого двора уезжал?
– Из этого.
– Они пили тут перед отъездом?
Все четверо щурились, оглядывались в полутьме от настольной лампы. Я
так понял, что кого-то арестовали или хотели арестовать.
– Да что случилось?
– Отвечайте, что вас спрашивают!
– Но…
– Поехали пьяные?
– Они пили тут?[14]

12 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Rasskazy. Sobranie sochinenii* [Stories, Collected Works], vol. 3 (Paris: 1978), 123.
13 Solzhenitsyn, "Matryona's Home," 41.
14 Solzhenitsyn, *Rasskazy*, 149.

In all his works, Solzhenitsyn paid close attention to personalized speech. A prominent case in point is his phonetic rendering of Stalin's Georgian accent in the novel *The First Circle*—Solzhenitsyn consistently replaces the correct "e" with the idiosyncratic "э." It is also known that Solzhenitsyn used colored pens to highlight the personalized speech of his protagonists in *The Red Wheel*. These artistic devices clearly testify to the fact that direct speech bears a high degree of stylistic autonomy. With this method, Solzhenitsyn moves the epic prose closer towards the drama.

Joseph Brodsky called Solzhenitsyn an epic writer and interpreted *The Gulag Archipelago* as an *Iliad* of the 20th century. To confirm this assessment, Brodsky pointed to the sheer length of the book.[15] However, the classification of *The Gulag Archipelago* as an epos arguably constitutes only one third of the truth. In his famous subtitle, Solzhenitsyn boldly called *The Gulag Archipelago* "An experiment in literary investigation." In fact, *The Gulag Archipelago* may be seen as an artistic synthesis of elements of poetry, drama, and epic: Solzhenitsyn included two of his poems in the *The Gulag Archipelago*, he let different dramatic voices speak out and drew an epic picture of the prisons and camps.

The poetic dimension of *The Gulag Archipelago* can be traced in its syntax. The text quite often reveals a hidden lyrical structure. One of the first sentences of the book is almost a perfect hexameter and hints at the *Iliad* as its model.

> How do people get to this enigmatic Archipelago?[16]
>
> Как попадают на этот таинственный Архипелаг?[17]
>
> _ ◡ ◡ _ ◡ ◡ _ ◡ ◡ _ _ ◡ _

The dactylic meter is also very prominently present in the other sentences of the first paragraph; there are even partial structures where one distich combines a hexameter with a pentameter. As at the beginning of "Matriona's Home," as also in the first sentence of *The Gulag Archipelago* Solzhenitsyn

15 Joseph Brodsky, "The Geography of Evil," in *Partisan Review* 44 (1977), 637–645, at 640.

16 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918–1956. An Experiment in Literary Investigation I–II*, trans. Thomas P. Whitney (New York: 1974), 3.

17 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Arkhipelag Gulag. 1918–1956. Opyt khudozhestvennogo issledovaniia* [The Gulag Archipelago, 1918–1956. An Experiment in Literary Investigation] (Ekaterinburg: 2006), 21.

begins by spelling out a numerical date—this is not just a technical indication, but a rhythmicized structure.

> In the year one thousand nine hundred and forty nine....[18]

> Году в тысяча девятьсот сорок девятом....[19]

In a way, the poetic prose of *The Gulag Archipelago* may be considered a counterpart to Solzhenitsyn's early narrative poem *Dorozhenka*.

The mix of poetry and prose is complemented by a tendency towards a dramatic presentation of different voices. In most of his texts, Solzhenitsyn's tries to avoid a single hero, though his own lyrical ego occasionally stands out quite prominently. This is evident in the ending of the lyric introduction to "Matriona's Home": "Da ja." The lyric ego sets himself on display even more clearly in the epigraph to *The Gulag Archipelago*:

> I dedicate this
> to all those who did not live
> to tell of it.
> And may they please forgive me
> for not having seen it all
> nor remembered it all,
> for not having divined all of it.[20]

> Посвящаю всем,
> кому не хватило жизни
> об этом рассказать.
> И да простят они мне,
> что я не всё увидел,
> не всё вспомнил,
> не обо всём догадался.[21]

The lyric ego presents itself here as a collective instance that gives a voice to all prisoners of the Gulag. Apparently, the legitimation of the authorial voice is a purely economic one. Only the lyric ego has a lifespan sufficiently long to tell

18 Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, ix.
19 Solzhenitsyn, *Arkhipelag Gulag*, 7.
20 Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, v.
21 Solzhenitsyn, *Arkhipelag Gulag*, 5.

what happened. However, this is a classic example of the rhetorical modesty *topos*. The true reason why the inmates of the Gulag did not tell their stories themselves was obviously not lack of time but lack of literary proficiency. In Solzhenitsyn's only partially veiled literary self-empowerment, the tragedy of the Gulag may be told only by a writer who masters poetry, drama, and epos all together.

3 The Separation of Literary Genres: Shalamov

If Solzhenitsyn tries to synthesize the genres, Shalamov separates them. His main strategy is not to create a harmony of different literary discourses, but to confront them in a contradictory way. Shalamov's understanding of poetry is very complex and ambivalent. The most difficult problem is the question of the lyrical sublimation of a given subject matter. From very early on, Shalamov reproached Solzhenitsyn with instrumentalizing the Gulag to advance his own literary career. The two authors had met in the editorial offices of the literary journal *Novyi Mir* in 1962, shortly before Solzhenitsyn's *Ivan Denisovich* came to be published with Khrushchev's personal blessing. However, the relationship between Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn was at best respectful and later became openly hostile. From the beginning, the two authors were rivals and got off on the wrong foot. Shalamov had tried to speed up the publication of his prose and poetry by asking Solzhenitsyn to forward his materials to the open-minded editor-in-chief of *Novyi Mir* Aleksandr Tvardovskii. Solzhenitsyn without further comment confined himself to presenting only Shalamov's poetry to Tvardovskii.[22]

Shalamov's harsh comments about Solzhenitsyn, and above all about his poetry, are well known. Shalamov, who never curbed his tongue, was especially outspoken in his notebooks from the 1960s:

> Solzhenitsyn's secret lies in the fact that he is a hopeless lyrical graphomaniac with the psychological make-up that goes with this horrible illness, a man who has churned out a huge amount of useless verse, which

22 Varlam Shalamov, *Novaia kniga. Vospominaniia. Zapisnye knizhki. Perepiska. Sledstvennye dela* [The New Book: Notebooks, Letters, Trial Documents] (Moscow: 2004), 374. The literary rivalry between Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov seems to echo a similar relationship between Bunin and Nabokov: Nabokov always praised Bunin's poetry highly in order to affirm the supremacy of his own prose. Maksim D. Shraer, *Bunin i Nabokov, Istoriia sopernichestva* [Bunin i Nabokov: The History of Their Rivalry] (Moscow: 2015).

> should never be shown anywhere, let alone printed. All his prose from "Ivan Denisovich" to "Matriona's Home" was no more than a drop in this ocean of dross.
>
> Тайна Солженицына заключается в том, что это – безнадежный стихотворный графоман с соответствующим психическим складом этой страшной болезни, создавший огромное количество непригодной стихотворной продукции, которую никогда и нигде нельзя предъявить, напечатать. Вся его проза от «Ивана Денисовича» до «Матрениного двора» была только тысячной частью в море стихотворного хлама.[23]

In this passage, Shalamov formulates the gist of his reproaches against Solzhenitsyn: the Gulag may neither be moralized nor aestheticized. However, the overly aggressive tone seems to point toward a deeper problem. My contention is that Shalamov's attacks on Solzhenitsyn are based on his own incapacity to write the Gulag without applying literary devices. In a way, he hates Solzhenitsyn as the incarnation of his own shadow, as the worst consequence of the pitfalls created by the utter incompatibility of the inhuman horror of the Gulag and the inherent beauty of poetic language.

There are many notes by Shalamov that point to his sober ideal of a literature that consciously rids itself of its "literariness," as the formalists would have it. He constructed his own literary ideal as the opposite of ornamental prose, as famously represented by the writings of Isaak Babel:

> I re-read Babel and crossed out all the "conflagrations blazing like resurrection" or the "girls who resembled jackboots" and so on. After that there was not much Babel left. It is very important not to rewrite a short story many times. The first version—as in poetry—is always the most sincere. As with the sense of "being there" that we get in television it is imperative not to lose this authenticity under a welter of revisions and prettification. The short story will become too literary—and this spells the death of the story. The material from Kolyma is such that it cannot bear literariness. Any literariness seems insulting, fraudulent.
>
> Я перечитывал Бабеля и вычеркивал «пожары, пылающие, как воскресенье», «девушек, похожих на ботфорты» и т. п. Мало тогда оставалось от Бабеля. Очень важно не переписывать рассказ много раз.

23 Shalamov, *Novaia kniga*, 374.

> Первый вариант – как в стихах – всегда самый искренный. Вот эту первичность, сходную с «эффектом присутствия» в телевидении, очень важно не утерять во всевозможных правках и отделках. Рассказ сделается слишком литературным – и это смерть рассказа. Материал Колымский таков, что не переносит литературности. Литературность кажется оскорблением, кражей.[24]

As a first attempt, Shalamov tried to solve the contradiction between his own need to write and the avoidance of "literariness" by reducing the creative role of the poet. He even recurred to Rilke's fictional hero Malte Laurids Brigge, who maintained that poems need to be rooted in a special life experience, such as the presence of death. According to Rilke, it is impossible to write poems on a regular basis. They can appear only in times of emergency.[25] It is not by chance that Shalamov turned to the authority of the poet par excellence, Rilke, in order to legitimize his own conception of a poetry that is not written by a skilled master, but produced by life itself.

In a similar vein, Shalamov stresses that the real material of poetry is not words, but blood. In a famous poem from 1962, he programmatically declared that poetry is not the result of literary artistry:

> Poetry—is fate, not craftsmanship,
> And if blood does not well up between its lines,
> If the soul does not lay bare its nakedness,
> Then there is no virtuoso alive
>
> whose observations, precise though they be,
> whose innovations however daring,
> Will shake the world with thunderous silence
> And conjure tears that rise to the throat.
>
> Стихи – это судьба, не ремесло,
> И если кровь не выступит на строчках,

24 May 24, 1965, to Yakov D. Grodzenskii. Sergei Y. Grodzenskii, *Vospominaniia ob Aleksandre Solzhenitsyne i Varlame Shalamove* [Memoirs about Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Varlam Shalamov] (Moscow: 2016), 113.

25 Varlam Shalamov, "Stikhi—eto opyt" [Poetry is Experience], in Varlam Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii v 7 tomakh* [Collected Works in Seven Volumes] (Moscow: 1998), vol. 4, 322–323.

Душа не обнажится наголо,
То наблюдений, даже самых точных

И самой небывалой новизны
Не хватит у любого виртуоза,
Чтоб вызвать в мире взрывы тишины
И к горлу подступающие слёзы.[26]

To be sure, this may be an impressive poem. But it is in itself a concealed, and aestheticized version of the Gulag experience. The virtuosi with their literary innovations are portrayed negatively here, but Shalamov himself uses quite daring rhymes and melodramatic metaphors to express his poetic idea. However, the surplus of pathos cannot hide the ambiguities of Shalamov's lyric text. There is even a double contradiction in this poem. Firstly, Shalamov voiced in his notebook the precise opposite of what he presents in the poem:

> Poetry is not all about "fate," and that is not why I write poems every day, as Irina thinks, but because I feel myself to be the best qualified master in this field, to be a mechanism so refined, that it is simply a shame to spend my time on anything other than poetry.
>
> В стихах тут дело не в том, что это «судьба», и потому я каждый день пишу стихи, как думает Ирина, а в том, что я чувствую себя квалифицированнейшим мастером по этой части, настолько тонким механизмом, что просто жаль использовать время на что-либо другое, кроме стихов.[27]

In the beginning of the 1960s Shalamov even planned to write a book with the title "How to write verse."[28] Later, Shalamov penned a letter to Yurii Lotman with a proposal to contribute a monograph on the lyric "intonation" for the series published in Tartu in the 1970s.[29] This was not a random choice. Shalamov admired the work of the members of OPOYaz in whose tradition

26 Varlam Shalamov, "Stikhi—eto sud'ba" [Poetry is Fate], in *Sobranie sochinenii v 7 tomakh*, vol. 3, 393.

27 Shalamov, *Novaia kniga*, 347.

28 Sergei Solov'ev, "'Teoriia zhizni i iskusstva byla u nego zakonchennaia …'" ["He Finished the Theory of Life and Art …"], in Varlam Shalamov, *Vse ili nichego. Esse o poezii i proze* [Everything or Nothing: Essays on Poetry and Prose] (Moscow: 2015), 5–25, at 21.

29 Shalamov, *Novaia kniga*, 933.

Lotman stands.[30] Shalamov knew Lotman's *The Structure of the Artistic Text* (1969) very well, and Lotman helped Shalamov to publish his article on sound-repetition (*zvukovoi povtor*) in the collection *Semiotics and Information Technologies* in 1976.[31]

Secondly, Shalamov eventually converted another, related notion, once despised, into a positive one. This time, his concern was not craftsmanship, but innovation. The complaint about misguided artistic innovation for its own sake runs throughout his essays. In 1968, Shalamov included the following sentence in an autograph to Gennadi Aigi: "I do not believe in free verse, but I do believe in poetry!" Already in conversation with Solzhenitsyn 1963, Shalamov asserted that it was useless to search for "formal innovations" or "fragmented forms."[32] In Shalamov's eyes an especially negative example was the poet Genrich Sapgir.

In his notebooks Shalamov highlighted the fact that Aleksandr Blok wrote better poetry in rhyme and strong meter than he did in the form of *vers libre*. "Vers libre," maintained Shalamov, was, in sporting parlance, very much "second-league."[33] On another occasion, he called "vers libre" second-rate: "it is the literal version of a poem that has yet to be written."[34] Shalamov's verdict on poets who did not follow this injunction was harsh: they were mere poetic amateurs, who felt entitled by sheer literary enthusiasm to turn their hand to verse.[35]

In these notes, Shalamov seems to advocate a strict adherence to the iron laws of traditional poetry. However, in a surprising about-face, Shalamov boasts in his notebook: "I am the innovator of tomorrow's tomorrow."[36] The contradiction could not be more striking: Shalamov scolds poets who want to be innovative in their works—and, at the same time, claims to be the most innovative of all and far ahead of his time.

In his literary essays, Shalamov provides a good deal of negative information, defining how poetry ought *not* to be. What then, according to Shalamov's

30 Shalamov, "Pokhod epigonov" [The Attack of the Epigones], in *Vse ili nichego*, 314–319, at 317.

31 Valerii Esipov, *Shalamov* (Moscow: 2012), 313.

32 *Varlam Shalamov v svidetel'stvakh sovremennikov* [Varlam Shalamov in Contemporary Testimonies], ed. Dmitrii Nich (Moscow: 2014), 29, 479.

33 Shalamov, *Novaia kniga*, 933.

34 "Свободный стих – это стих второго сорта. Это – подстрочник еще не написанного стихотворения." Varlam Shalamov, "Tablitsa umnozheniia dlia molodykh poetov" [The Multiplication Table for Young Poets], in *Vse ili nichego*, 303–313, at 308.

35 Shalamov, "Pokhod epigonov," 317.

36 Shalamov, *Novaia kniga*, 358.

view, should poetry be? The most important feature of a poem is what he calls the "intonation." Shalamov defines intonation as the "poet's face, his voice, his literary passport, his right to write poetry."[37] More precisely, "intonation" is the sum of all the specifics present in each line, each strophe, and each single poem. These specifics relate primarily to the position and the order of the words in a poetic line.[38] Intonation is a question of phrasing, which is achieved by applying a regular poetic meter.[39] In a more poetic idiom, Shalamov defines a poem as a "slowing down of the river of sounds by means of sense," "casting the molten lava of sounds into forms of sense."[40]

To Shalamov, the cornerstone of intonation is the musical triad of consonants. He divides the Russian consonants into so-called "phonetic classes" and arranges them in a chart.[41]

Класс	Обозначение класса	Class	Title of the class
Д–Дь–Т–Ть	Т	D–D'–T–T'	T
В–Вь–Ф–Фь	Ф	V–V'–F–F'	F
М–Мь–Н–Нь	Н	M–M'–N–N'	N
Л–Ль–Р–Рь	Р	L–L'–R–R'	R
З–Зь–С–Сь	С	Z–Z'–S–S'	S
З–Ж	З	Z–Zh	Z
Ш–Щ–Ч	Ч	Sh–Shch–Ch	Ch
С–Ш	Ш	S–Sh	Sh
Х–Г–К	К	Kh–G–K	K
Б–Бь–П–Пь	П	B–B'–P–P'	P
Ж–Ш	Ж	Zh–Sh	Zh
Ц	Ц	Ts	Ts

Not unlike Solzhenitsyn, Shalamov is an admirer of Russian classical poetry. For him, Pushkin's poem "Mednyi vsadnik" is the pinnacle of Russian poetry. In an essay on lyric rhyme, Shalamov even elevates the Russian national poet to

37 Shalamov, "Tablitsa umnozheniia dlia molodykh poetov," 310.
38 Varlam Shalamov, "Poeticheskaia intonatsiia" [Lyric Intonation], in *Vse ili nichego*, 320–337, at 321.
39 Ibid., 334.
40 Varlam Shalamov, "Zvukovoi povtor: poisk smysla" [The Repetition of Sounds: In Search of Sense], in *Vse ili nichego*, 386–413, at 411.
41 Ibid., 396–399.

absolute righteousness: "In poetry, Pushkin knew everything."[42] But Shalamov is also full of praise for Lermontov. He sees him as a champion of the lyric repetition of sounds in the poem "The Prophet." The basis of this high appreciation is his own chart of "phonetic classes" that perfectly applies to Lermontov's poetry:

> I put sackcloth and ashes on,
> And ran—a beggar—from the town,
> And there I live in desert lone,
> Like birds, on food that God sends down.[43]
>
> Посыпал пеплом я главу,
> Из городов бежал я нищий,
> И вот в пустыне я живу,
> Как птицы, даром Божьей пищи.[44]

Now, Shalamov certainly has many an excellent poem to his name, but his attack upon Solzhenitsyn in a certain sense rebounds upon Shalamov himself. Unfortunately, there is also some poetic dross—the precise word Shalamov used for Solzhenitsyn's lyric production—among Shalamov's own poems. Consider his poem about the Danish fairytale writer Andersen (1960) which is very traditional, both in terms of form *and* content:

> Andersen
> He compasses the seas and land
> The depths and shallows of the world,
> And people's wounded souls he sets
> In fairytales of plainest form.
>
> Андерсен
> Он обойдет моря и сушу –
> Весь мир, что мелок и глубок,
> Людскую раненую душу
> Положит в сказочный лубок. ...[45]

42 Varlam Shalamov, "Rifma" [Rhyme], in *Vse ili nichego*, 360–374, at 361.
43 Trans. Yevgeny Bonver.
44 Shalamov, "Zvukovoi povtor," 390.
45 Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, 384.

In other poems from the same period, however, Shalamov was able to live up to his own program of poetic intonation. "Ust'e ruch'ia" (1959) abounds in sophisticated sound patterns:

The mouth of a creek
An unknown creek,
without name, without purpose
not southern enough
for these nights of ours,

Amidst seagulls' flight
and polar summer,
and the shining ice of
emerald colour.

Устье ручья
Безвестный ручей,
Безымянный, ненужный,
Для наших ночей
Недостаточно южный,

Где чаек полет
И полярное лето,
Светящийся лед
Изумрудного цвета. ...[46]

In this poem, many of Shalamov's literary devices, including alliteration, intonation, and rhythm may be observed. Shalamov claimed that prose is constructed in the same way as poetry. In fact, one of his most famous texts from the Kolyma stories, "Cherry Brandy," is more of a poem than a prosaic text. This becomes clear if the text is broken up according to its poetic lines and its phonetic intonation units.

The poet was dying.
His hands, swollen from hunger
with their bloodless fingers
and filthy overgrown nails,

46 Varlam Shalamov, "Ust'e ruch'ia" [Water Mouth], in *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, 376.

> lay on his chest,
> exposed to the cold.[47]

> Поэт умирал.
> Большие, вздутые голодом кисти рук
> с белыми бескровными пальцами
> и грязными, отросшими трубочкой ногтями
> лежали на груди,
> не прячась от холода.

Shalamov read his text aloud at a literary gathering dedicated to Mandelstam in 1965. One person who attended this evening characterized Shalamov's performance as follows:

> [He is] pale, with fire in his eyes, and reminds one of the Archpriest Avvakum, his movements are uncoordinated, his arms are separated from the man, he speaks ceremonially, free, at the limit, he is about to crash and fall down …

> бледный, с горящими глазами, напоминает протопопа Аввакума, движения некоординированные, руки все время ходят отдельно от человека, говорит прекрасно, свободно, на последнем пределе, – вот-вот сорвется и упадет …[48]

In that same year, in a personal letter Shalamov insisted on the higher truth of his description of Mandelstam's death. Ultimately, he valued his literary imagination higher than a factual testimonial—of course, Shalamov himself had not personally witnessed Mandelstam's death:

> In the short story "Cherry Brandy" there are fewer violations of historical truth than in Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*. It describes the transit camp in Vladivostok where Mandelstam died. It describes death from starvation, death from dystrophy, when life recedes by turns. Mandelstam starved to death. What other truth do you need?

47 Varlam Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales*, trans. John Glad (London: 1994), 69.

48 "Vecher pamiati O. E. Mandel'shtama" [An Evening in Memory of Osip Mandelstam], in Varlam Shalamov, *Vospominaniia* [Memoirs] (Moscow: 2001), 304–315, at 313.

> В рассказе «Шерри-бренди» нарушения исторической правды меньше, чем в Пушкинском «Борисе Годунове». Описана та самая пересылка во Владивостоке, где умер Мандельштам. Описана смерть от голода, от алиментарной дистрофии, где жизнь то возвращается, то уходит. Мандельштам умер от голода. Какая вам нужна еще правда?[49]

An important issue in Shalamov's understanding of poetry is the notion of "écriture automatique," as the French avant-garde of the 1920s would have it. But in this case, too, we can observe some striking contradictions.

Shalamov claimed that he wrote his "Kolyma" poem "He warms his frozen fingers" *en plein air*, immediately upon its conception.[50] The text was allegedly never altered. Shalamov even purports to have thought it a blasphemy to change its "rhythmic design."[51]

This contradicts the textual history of most other poems written in Kolyma. Shalamov himself pointed out that his other poems from Kolyma were written in more than 100 variations.[52] This is probably the opposite extreme of exaggeration when it comes to depicting his own writing practices. The middle ground seems more likely. In fact, Shalamov himself admitted that the writing of poetry was a technological process:

> Many consider poetry to be a miracle, a riddle. I do not think so, and I explain its appearance in a notebook in the most satisfying, completely materialistic way. Poems get into the notebook by dint of being set down in written form. This fixation is unique and subject to laws different from those which apply to oral speech.
>
> Многие считают стихи чудом, загадкой. Я не считаю и самым удовлетворительным, вполне материалистическим образом объясняю их появление в тетради. В тетрадь стихи попадают путем письмен-

49 May 24, 1965 to Yakov D. Grodzenskii, in *Vospominanija ob Aleksandre Solzhenitsyne i Varlame Shalamove*, 111.

50 Michael Nicholson, "Shalamov v spore o lagernoi poezii" [Shalamov in the Debate about Labor-Camp Poetry], in *IV Mezhdunarodnye Shalamovskie Chteniia* (*Moskva 18–19 iiunia 1997 goda*) (Moscow: 1997), 104–113.

51 Varlam Shalamov, *Kolymskie tetradi* [Notebooks from Kolyma] (Moscow: 1994), 270.

52 Ibid., 267.

> ной записи. Эта фиксация и своеобразна, и подвержена другим законам, чем просто устная речь.[53]

Generally, Shalamov maintained there should be only two redactions of a poem:

> In theory, every poem can be improved. It can be enhanced, and such improvement could well go on endlessly. The editing of the second written version is for me an incredible, purely physical torment; any further enhancement and improvement costs me so much nervous strain that it is better to dispense with it altogether. The difficulty here is that it is very hard to return to that unique state, that specific tension of nerves, talent, spirit, that first thrust the poem onto paper.
>
> Теоретически любое стихотворение можно улучшить. Добавить коечто и, вероятно, улучшать можно бесконечно. Я так не делаю. Переработка второй записи представляет для меня невероятное, чисто физическое мучение; дальнейшее улучшение и добавление стоят таких нервов, что лучше от него отказаться. Трудность здесь заключается в том, что очень трудно вернуться в уникальное состояние определенного напряжения нервов, таланта, ума, которое ранее вытолкнуло на бумагу стихи.[54]

There is another clue that reveals the advantages of editing and reworking lyric texts. In a contribution to the important journal *Voprosy literatury* in 1963, Shalamov carefully tracked the different versions of Bunin's translation of Longfellow's epic poem "The Song of Hiawatha." He concluded that the last of several versions was the most successful.[55]

We can note a final contradiction in Shalamov's challenging conceptualization of poetry. Famously, he likened the "true Gulag writer" to Pluto who rises from hell. At the same time he rejected what he called the touristic approach: Shalamov refers to Orpheus, who visits hell with his instrument to sing there.

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53 Varlam Shalamov, "Poet iznutri" [A Poet from within], in Varlam Shalamov, *Neskol'ko moikh zhiznei. Proza. Poeziia. Esse* [Some of my Lives: Prose, Poetry, Essays] (Moscow: 1996), 434–441, at 439.

54 Shalamov, "Zvukovoi povtor," 392.

55 Varlam Shalamov, "Rabota Bunina nad perevodom *Pesni o Gaivate*" [Bunin's Work on His Translation of *The Song of Hiawatha*], in *Sobranie sochinenii v 7 tomakh*, vol. 7, 238–245.

Shalamov, however, does not really have Orpheus in mind so much as Solzhenitsyn, who is not merely a tourist but, even worse, a "manager" of his own fame.

And yet, Shalamov praises one of these tourists in one of his notebooks from 1954—namely Chekhov, who, after Sakhalin, did not write a single "happy" short story. As Shalamov puts it, "a new, more serious period in his literary activity begins."[56] From Shalamov's perspective, such a turn towards seriousness should certainly be valued positively. At the same time, tourism to catastrophic places would seem to yield some literary benefit.[57]

Shalamov's strict theory of pure poetry without artistic embellishment or personal disinvolvement of the author is not tenable. This is not to say that Shalamov was a shallow theoretician of literature. Rather, the irresolvable contradictions in his reasoning should be seen as a tragic consequence of the simultaneous necessity and impossibility of writing the Gulag.

4 Poetry under the Conditions of Prose: Hegel

In order to answer Adorno's question, adapted to the Russian case, we should turn to a more fundamental problem: Do Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov have a lyric mindset? Only if they do would it be possible to say that the Gulag lends itself to a description in poetry (or in prose that is very close to poetry).

What is a "lyric mindset"? Probably this concept is most adequately explained with reference to the Hegelian categories of poetry and prose.[58] Hegel considered poetry to be the original mode of human expression, as presenting an unconditional truth. Prose followed poetry, and prose applied the logical categories of human thought such as causality or consecutivity to reality. However, after the emergence of prose, poetry is only able to emulate its original claim to truth and freedom.

Truth is a central category in the works of Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov. Both writers claimed to put truth at the heart of their literary writings. However, their poetics are radically different: Solzhenitsyn believed in the possibility of a "literary investigation" of the Gulag, whereas Shalamov advocated a direct transcription of the horrors of the Gulag that he claimed to render without

56 "Это новый, более серьезный период в его литературной деательности." Shalamov, *Novaia kniga*, 269.

57 Elena Mikhailik, "Dostoevsky and Shalamov: Orpheus and Pluto," in *The Dostoevsky Journal* 1 (2000), 147–157.

58 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, trans. Francis Osmaston (London: 1920), vol. 4, 21ff.

the slightest artistic elaboration. Shalamov went so far as to attribute to poetry an all-encompassing capacity to represent the world:

> One of the poetic truths that I have discovered is the observation that there is no physical, spiritual, social or moral phenomenon in the world that could not be mirrored in verse. Poetry is a universal language, the only common denominator to which all the phenomena of the world may be reduced with no remainder.
>
> Одна из поэтических истин, найденная мной, – это наблюдение, что в мире нет таких явлений физического, духовного, общественного, нравственного мира, которые не могли быть отражены стихами. Стихи – всеобщий язык, единственный знаменатель, на который делятся без остатка все явления мира.[59]

Eventually, both approaches to literary truth are doomed to failure when describing the Gulag experience. From a Hegelian point of view, poetry historically comes before prose and reappears again under the conditions of prose. Both Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov write their texts in a literary continuum between poetry and prose. In their writings, they oscillate between an archaic poetic claim of lyrical truth and their own literary achievements that necessarily imply stylistic devices.

The post-lyric condition of both Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov could also be termed their post-Dantesque condition. Both writers allude to the *Divina Commedia*, which, of course, is the most important model when it comes to depicting hell. However, Dante was able to embed his *Inferno* in an optimistic theological conception that eventually leads to Paradise. The allusions to Dante are in both cases quite obvious. Solzhenitsyn used Dante's vision of hell as title metaphor in his novel *The First Circle*; Shalamov arranged his first cycle of *Kolyma Stories* in 33 stories.[60] Like Dante, both Russian authors incorporated a very coarse style into their depiction of hell. But unlike Dante, Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov cannot return to Paradise. For modern authors, paradise got lost in the course of the literary developments of the 19th and

59 Shalamov, "Koe-chto o moikh stikhakh" [A Word or Two about My Verse], in *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 4, 339–354, at 354.

60 Valerii Esipov, "Ob istorizme kolymskikh rasskazov" [About the Historicism of The Kolyma Stories], in *Varlam Shalamov v kontekste mirovoi i sovetskoi istorii* [Varlam Shalamov in the Context of World Literature and Soviet History], ed. Sergei Solov'ev (Moscow: 2013), 131–140.

20th centuries, when the prose novel was established as the principal literary structure within which the individual and the world clash. Shalamov explicitly stated that the novel as a literary form was hopelessly dead.[61]

At this point, it makes sense to turn to Georg Lukács's terminology. The young Lukács tried to apply Hegelian categories of literary appropriation of the world to contemporary culture. For Lukács, the most appropriate literary form for the situation of modern man was the novel with its "transcendental homelessness." The epic was dead for Lukács, because its literary cosmos endowed even tragedies with a higher purpose, thus making individual suffering part of a holistic conception.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Lukács hailed the emergence of Solzhenitsyn as a writer. In Lukács' eyes, Solzhenitsyn's works epitomized a serious manifestation of Socialist Realism in which Lukács fervently believed.[62] For Lukács, Solzhenitsyn represented the new Dostoevsky. In 1916, when Lukács wrote his acclaimed *Theory of the Novel*, Dostoevsky heralded for him a new kind of literature that transcended both the classic epic and the bourgeois novel. Now, in 1970, Solzhenitsyn was able to present a similar synthesis in the Hegelian sense of the word. Lukács went so far as to celebrate the novels *In the First Circle* and *Cancer Ward* as "preliminary summits" of world literature.

For Lukács, Solzhenitsyn presented the perfect solution to his own dilemma. Since 1956, Lukács had engaged in a battle on two fronts: firstly, against the Stalinist writers, and secondly, against what he called avant-gardism, with writers such as Kafka, Musil, Beckett, Proust, and Joyce at the helm. Stalinist literature engaged in a misconceived exclusive objectivism, avant-gardism in a misconceived exclusive subjectivism.[63] Solzhenitsyn, with his realistic prose, seemed to assign a place in society to the single individual.[64]

There may be a lot of wishful thinking in Lukács's appraisal of Solzhenitsyn. But Shalamov's criticism of Solzhenitsyn points in exactly the same direction—with the values reversed. In Shalamov's eyes, there was too much sense and too much aesthetics in Solzhenitsyn works. Conversely, Solzhenitsyn criticized the *Kolyma Stories* because there were too few "characters, persons," these people had no "past," and "no individual view on life." Solzhenitsyn was enough of a writer himself to ask whether Shalamov deliberately

61 Shalamov, "O proze" [On Prose], in *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 4, 357–370, at 357.

62 Ranjana Saxena, "György Lukács and the Russian Soviet Factor," in *Social Scientist* 46/1–2) (2018), 65–90, at 83.

63 Georg Lukács, *Wider den missverstandenen Realismus* (Hamburg: 1958).

64 Georg Lukács, "Solschenizyn: Ein Tag im Leben des Iwan Denissowitsch," in Georg Lukács, *Russische Revolution, russische Literatur* (*Ausgewählte Schriften III*) (Reinbek: 1969), 296–312.

avoided creating individual characters, but eventually came to the rather condescending conclusion that all the characters in Shalamov's prose were basically stand-ins for the author's own biographical self. Quite consequentially, Solzhenitsyn confessed that he had always liked Shalamov's poetry better than his prose.[65]

In the end, both writers had a point in their mutual criticism. But ultimately, neither of them is to blame. In the post-Dantesque situation of the 20th century, there is no perfect literary solution when it comes to the poetics of horror, truth and its artistic representation.

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65 *Varlam Shalamov v svidetel'stvakh sovremennikov*, 478; Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "S Varlamom Shalamovym" [With Varlam Shalamov], in *Novyi mir* 4 (1999), accessed August 10, 2018, magazines.russ.ru/novyi_mi/1999/4/solgen.html.

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CHAPTER 3

More than a Cat: Reflections on Shalamov's and Solzhenitsyn's Writings through the Perspective of Trauma Studies

Andrea Gullotta

In an article written for the third issue of *Shalamovskii sbornik* in 2002, Elena Mikhailik proposed an analysis of the differences between Varlam Shalamov and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's writings, taking inspiration from the way in which Shalamov had critiqued the author of "Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha" (One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich). Shalamov contested the reliability of some details given by Solzhenitsyn concerning living conditions in the labor camp in which Shukhov and his fellow prisoners served their terms.[1] Mikhailik's core claim is that there is a consistent difference in the way the two writers approached their readers. Others have made similar observations, including Leona Toker, who in the present volume focuses on the "lightening effect" in the work of both writers.[2] The scholarly literature on both authors includes a considerable number of critical and academic works, many of which compare the stylistic features of the two.

Indeed, the works of Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov are very different. Like all Gulag literature authors, they differed in their ideas, worldviews, and stylistic preferences. In this chapter I offer a new perspective on the differences between Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov by analyzing some stylistic features through the lens of *trauma studies*.

The umbrella term 'trauma studies' covers a wide range of scholarly research that tackles various aspects related to trauma. This is a transdisciplinary field, employing approaches from clinical as well as cultural, social, and literary studies. Scholars have considered the effects of trauma on the individual and/or on some communities, focusing also on questions such as the representation of trauma in various forms (interviews, memoirs, fiction, etc.). Here I limit myself to the use of certain key concepts developed in the field—some

1 Elena Mikhailik, "Kot, begushchii mezhdu Solzhenitsynym i Shalamovym" [The Cat that Runs between Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov], in *Shalamovskii sbornik 3*, ed. Valerii Esipov (Vologda: 2002), 101–114.

2 See Leona Toker's chapter in this volume.

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of which are drawn also from clinical studies of trauma, in particular regarding patients suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)—in order to analyze the implications that the trauma suffered by Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn might have had on their representations of traumatic events. Here I draw on theories developed by scholars such as Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra, who see a direct correlation between the medical symptoms suffered by a person because of trauma, and the way this person represents the events that caused the trauma.

Such an approach has received little attention from scholars working on Gulag literature, who, when referring to trauma, have not related it to the field of trauma studies—with the exception of Alfred Gall's quotes from LaCapra in his description of Lev Konson's and Leo Lipski's terse style as an effect of trauma, and of Sarah J. Young's article on repetition in Shalamov's *Kolyma Stories*.[3] The latter is the most in-depth study on the correlation between trauma and representation in the field of Gulag studies published to date. Here, however, I do not restrict the analysis to Shalamov, but propose a comparison with Solzhenitsyn's work; second, I employ clinical studies in attempting to identify a correlation between PTSD symptoms and literary form; third, I outline further implications of such an approach on other works pertaining the Gulag and/or Soviet repression.

In many ways, this article marks a continuation of research I published in 2012, aiming to understand how trauma studies can help the analysis of Gulag literature in more generic terms.[4] In the present contribution, I test one of the hypotheses proposed in that publication: that the intensity of trauma lived by an author may have an impact on his or her style—now focusing on the works of Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn. Instead of starting a "competition of trauma" between the two, I seek to identify in their texts instances which may help in tracing the impact of trauma on their creative process, and then show how trauma has (or has not) surfaced in their writing, influencing their literary form. Here I take a different stance from that of Young, who holds that the repetitions in Shalamov's writing, although related to trauma, are a conscious

3 See Alfred Gall, "Disconcerting concision. Laconism as principle of text organization. Leo Lipski (Dzień i noc) and Lev Konson (Kratkie povesti)," in (*Hi-*)*Stories of the Gulag. Fiction and Reality*, ed. F. Fischer von Weikersthal and K. Thaidigsmann (Heidelberg: 2016), 205–218; Sarah J. Young, "Recalling the Dead: Repetition, Identity, and the Witness in Varlam Shalamov's *Kolymskie rasskazy*," *Slavic Review* 70, 2 (2011), 353–372.

4 Andrea Gullotta, "Trauma and Self in the Soviet Context: Remarks on Gulag Writings," *AvtobiografiЯ. Journal on Life Writing and the Representation of the Self in Russian Culture*, 1 (2012), 73–87.

literary device aimed at drawing the readers into the events and thus making them witnesses. Instead, I argue that some of these devices are influenced by PTSD symptoms and should not be seen simply as stylistic choices. However, I do not posit that Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn's works are solely the products of trauma: the writer's agency is not under discussion. Similarly, I do not propose that all the literature deriving from the experience in the labor camps can be seen through this prism. While Gulag literature is a literature of trauma—a literature generated by traumatic conditions, dealing with trauma and often inspired by recalling the trauma—it is still literature, and not a reaction to a clinical symptom. In other words, I do not posit that trauma studies should replace literary studies, nor do I reject the many valid approaches and critical studies that have been devoted to Gulag literature: rather, I suggest that, alongside the analysis of narratological, philosophical, ethical, aesthetic, and socio-cultural aspects of these texts and of each author's specific peculiarities, trauma studies can indicate additional interpretations that may contribute to a deeper understanding of this literature.

Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn's Writings of Trauma

Varlam Shalamov and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn differed in many ways, and their differences—aesthetic, philosophical, personal—were among the reasons for their personal clashes, as recounted by both authors. There is one difference, however, that has not been put into sharp relief—a difference that appears in the first contact between the two authors, the letter Shalamov wrote to Solzhenitsyn in November 1962 after reading "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich."

> This is a very intelligent, very talented tale. It is a camp from the point of view of a camp 'hard worker', who has professional skills, who knows how to 'earn', a hard worker, not a Tsezar' Markovich[5] or a *kavtorang*.[6] He is not an 'adrift'[7] intellectual, but a peasant experienced by a great

5 Shalamov is here referring to one of the characters in "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich," a repressed film director.

6 A reference to another character, the navy commander (*kapitan vtorogo ranga*, or *kavtorang*) Buinovskii.

7 In Gulag slang, the verb 'доплыть' (literally 'swim/sail to somewhere', or 'swim/sail as far as somewhere') meant to arrive at the most extreme stage of physical exhaustion. See Zhak Rossi, *Spravochnik po Gulagu* [The Gulag Handbook] (Moscow: 1991), vol. 1, 104.

hardship, who has withstood this hardship and now speaks about the past with humour.

Everything in the tale is accurate. It is a 'light' camp, not quite a real one. The real camp is also shown in the tale, and it is shown very well: this terrible camp—Shukhov's Izhma—breaks through in the tale like white steam through the cracks of a cold barrack. … In the labor camp where Shukhov is, he has a spoon, but a spoon in a real camp is a useless tool. Both the soup and the *kasha* are of such consistency that you can drink them from the rim; a cat walks around the hospital—that is also inaccurate for a real camp, where the cat would have been eaten long ago. You managed to show this dirty, terrible past, and to show it very strongly, through these flashes of Shukhov's memory, his memories of Izhma. The school of Izhma is the school where Shukhov learned how to live, accidentally surviving. All this in the tale screams in a full voice, for my ear, at least.[8]

Повесть эта очень умна, очень талантлива. Это – лагерь с точки зрения лагерного «работяги», который знает мастерство, умеет «заработать», работяги, не Цезаря Марковича и не кавторанга. Это – не «доплывающий» интеллигент, а испытанный великой пробой крестьянин, выдержавший эту пробу и рассказывающий теперь с юмором о прошлом.

В повести всё достоверно. Это лагерь «легкий», не совсем настоящий. Настоящий лагерь в повести тоже показан, и показан очень хорошо: этот страшный лагерь – Ижма Шухова – пробивается в повести, как белый пар сквозь щели холодного барака. … В каторжном лагере, где сидит Шухов, у него есть ложка, ложка для настоящего лагеря – лишний инструмент. И суп, и каша такой консистенции, что можно выпить через борт, около санчасти ходит кот – тоже невероятно для настоящего лагеря, – кота давно бы съели. Это грозное, страшное былое Вам удалось показать, и показать очень сильно, сквозь эти вспышки памяти Шухова, воспоминания об Ижме. Школа Ижмы – это и есть та школа, где и выучился Шухов, случайно оставшийся в живых. Все это в повести кричит полным голосом, для моего уха, по крайней мере.

8 Varlam Shalamov, *Novaia kniga. Vospominaniia, zapisnye knizhki, perepiska, sledstvennye dela* [The New Book: Memoirs, Notebooks, Correspondence, Files of the Inquiry] (Moscow: 2004), 642–643. All translations from Russian are mine, apart from where otherwise stated.

Shalamov devoted most of this letter to show his appreciation of the way the author of "Ivan Denisovich" depicted many aspects of life in the Gulag—but argued that some details of Solzhenitsyn's work were not veridical. But while Mikhailik and Toker focus on Solzhenitsyn's authorial decision to present to the reader a lighter labor camp than those described in *Kolyma Stories*, I wish to add another point of view to their insightful ideas.

I see Shalamov's remarks as being fueled by the objective fact that the two had radically different experiences of trauma—hence his remarks on Izhma, which recalled a type of experience similar to that of Shalamov. Solzhenitsyn spent a total of eight years in the labor camps, three of which in a *sharashka*, one of the laboratories where scientists worked on industrial and military projects and received better food rations and overall better treatment than other prisoners in Soviet camps and prisons.[9] In his autobiographical texts on the experience of the Gulag (the parts of *Arkhipelag Gulag* [The Gulag Archipelago] in which he directly recounts his own life in the camp, and hints at his camp experience in *Bodalsia telenok s dubom* [The Oak and the Calf]), traumatic events like beatings, hunger, and humiliation are indeed recounted vividly. However, they do not appear as devastating as those recounted in the memoirs of Shalamov, who spent almost 20 years in Soviet prisons and camps, most of which in the Kolyma, among the harshest in the history of the Gulag.

As stated above, in focusing on the differences in their experience of trauma I do not mean to start a competition between the two, but rather to show how, judging from their personal documents, the intensity of the trauma—and of the scars it left—was stronger for Shalamov than for Solzhenitsyn. I argue that this disparity had a direct effect on their writings, in particular on the literary form adopted in their writings of trauma—a term I use to refer specifically to texts (regardless of their literary genre) written about one's own experience of traumatic events, whether personally suffered, or only witnessed. To understand how the intensity of trauma influenced Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn, we should consider how they describe their own creative processes.

Solzhenitsyn describes the genesis of "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich" thus:

> In 1950, during a long winter day in a camp, I was dragging a stretcher with a fellow inmate and thought: how could one describe our entire life in the camp? Essentially, it is enough to describe one whole day in detail, in the smallest details, and even the day of the simplest hard worker; thus, our whole life will be reflected. And it would not even be neces-

9 Rossi, *Spravochnik po Gulagu*, vol. 2, 453.

> sary to insist on any horrors, no need to describe some special day, but a usual one, a day of which years are comprised. I thought so, and this plan remained in my mind. For nine years I did not touch it and only in 1959, nine years later, I sat down and wrote. … I did not write it for long at all, only forty days, less than one and a half months.[10]

> Я в 50-м году, в какой-то долгий лагерный зимний день таскал носилки с напарником и подумал: как описать всю нашу лагерную жизнь? По сути, достаточно описать один всего день в подробностях, в мельчайших подробностях, притом день самого простого работяги, и тут отразится вся наша жизнь. И даже не надо нагнетать каких-то ужасов, не надо, чтоб это был какой-то особенный день, а – рядовой, вот тот самый день, из которого складываются годы. Задумал я так, и этот замысел остался у меня в уме, девять лет я к нему не прикасался и только в 1959, через девять лет, сел и написал. … Писал я его недолго совсем, всего дней сорок, меньше полутора месяцев.

Mikhailik uses this interview as a starting point for analyzing the narrative strategies Solzhenitsyn utilizes to depict a "softer" camp, all the while hinting at the existence of harsher camps. This depiction shows us a "climax" effect in Solzhenitsyn's creative process. He explains how he had an inspiration while in the camp which accompanied him for nine years until he could "sit and write" his *povest'* for about 40 days—he had kept this idea in mind for a long time, and finally developed it into a text over the course of a month and a half. This image is radically different from the one given by Shalamov about the process of writing the *Kolymskie rasskazy* (Kolyma Stories), as recounted in his essay "O proze" (On Prose): "Every tale, every sentence is earlier screamed in an empty room. I always speak to myself when I write. I scream, I threaten, I cry. And I cannot stop crying…"[11] This dramatic image of a man in pain is described in further detail by Irina Sirotinskaia:

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10 Solzhenitsyn described the origin of "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich" in an interview with Barry Holland for the BBC in 1982. For the full text of the interview see: http://solzhenitsyn.world/radiointerviu-k-20-letiiu-vykhoda-odnogo-dnia-ivana-denisovicha/radiointerviu-k-20letiiu-vykhoda-odnogo-dnia-ivana.html. The quoted sentence is also found in Liudmila Saraskina, *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn* (Moscow: 2008), 461.

11 "Каждый рассказ, каждая фраза его предварительно прокричана в пустой комнате – я всегда говорю сам с собой, когда пишу. Кричу, угрожаю, плачу. И слез мне не остановить…" Varlam Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh* [Collected Works in Six Volumes] (Moscow: 2013), vol. 6, 495.

I heard from his voice, and later read, almost all his tales, especially those written in 1966 and later. … He often would tell me how dear it was to him the opportunity to "disburden his mind," down to the bottom. We also had arguments. I reproached him for what I considered to be a prolonged exposition, an excessive philosophizing. It should go into the subtext, as I said, in an essay.

It seemed to me that this was due to his unsatisfied thirst to speak out. Therefore, everything ended up being included in the tale, even what should have gone in an essay, in memoirs, in letters. The words flew under the pressure of unspoken thoughts and feelings. "All my tales are shouted…" he wrote to me in 1971. So it was. At the time of birth, precisely this high emotional intensity did not allow him to control the flow. And then he rarely returned to the tale. …

And I used to tell him that he should have edited his works a little, to finish something, to correct something after the tale was written down. He would be very upset, and as a reply to me he somehow wrote an entire essay, defending the "free manifestation of the writer's soul" as a creative method.

Почти все его рассказы, особенно написанные в 1966 году и позднее, я слышала от него, а потом читала. … Не раз говорил он мне, как дорога ему возможность «высказаться» до дна. Были у нас и споры. Я упрекала его в порой затянутой, на мой взгляд, экспозиции, в излишнем философствовании. Это должно уйти в подтекст, говорила я, в эссе.

Мне казалось, что это от неутоленной жажды высказаться. Оттого, что в рассказ шло все – и то, что должно идти в эссе, в мемуары, в письма. Слова вылетали под напором невысказанных мыслей, чувств. «Все мои рассказы прокричаны…» – писал он мне в 1971 году. Так это и было. В момент рождения именно высокий эмоциональный накал не давал возможности контролировать поток. А потом он редко возвращался к записанному рассказу. …

А я ему говорила, что надо немного редактировать себя – кое-что отделать, поправить после того, как рассказ записан. Он очень огорчался, и в ответ мне написал как-то целое эссе, отстаивая «свободное проявление души писателя» как творческий метод.[12]

Here Sirotinskaia quotes directly from Shalamov's essay "On My Prose":

12 Shalamov, "O moei proze" [On My Prose], in Varlam Shalamov, *Neskol'ko moikh zhiznei. Proza. Poeziia. Esse* [Some of My Lives: Prose, Poetry, Essays] (Moscow: 1996), 450.

Each of my stories is a slap in the face of Stalinism and, like every slap in the face, it obeys laws of purely muscular nature… In the story, completeness does not always correspond to the author's intentions. The most successful of my stories were written in clean copy. To be fair, rewritten from the draft once. All my best stories were written this way. There are no finishing touches in them, but they do have completeness…

All the past, everything is as if it is crowded in my brain, and it's enough to open some lever in the brain, take a pen, and the story is written.

My stories represent a successful and conscious fight against what is called the genre of the tale… The slap must be sharp, resonant… Each of my tales is absolutely accurate. It has the accuracy of a document… For an artist, for an author, the most important thing is the opportunity to disburden one's mind, to give a free brain to that stream. The author himself is a witness, gives the final formula, the verdict, through each of his own words, through each change of his soul. And the author is not really free to confirm or reject it through any feeling or literary judgment, but to disburden his mind in his own way. If the tale is taken to an end, such a judgment appears.

Каждый мой рассказ – пощечина сталинизму и, как всякая пощечина, имеет законы чисто мускульного характера… В рассказе отделанность не всегда отвечает намерению автора – наиболее удачные рассказы написаны набело, вернее, переписаны с черновика один раз. Так писались все лучшие мои рассказы. В них нет отделки, а законченность есть…

Все, что раньше, – все как бы толпится в мозгу, и достаточно открыть какой-то рычаг в мозгу – взять перо – и рассказ написан.

Рассказы мои представляют успешную и сознательную борьбу с тем, что называется жанром рассказа… Пощечина должна быть короткой, звонкой… Каждый мой рассказ – это абсолютная достоверность. Это достоверность документа… Для художника, для автора самое главное – это возможность высказаться – дать свободный мозг тому потоку. Сам автор – свидетель, любым своим словом, любым своим поворотом души он дает окончательную формулу, приговор. И автор волен не то что подтвердить или отвергнуть каким-то чувством или литературным суждением, но высказаться самому по-своему. Если рассказ доведен до конца, такое суждение появляется.[13]

13 Ibid.

Judging from his own words, and as confirmed in Sirotinskaia's account, Shalamov seems to have experienced, while writing his tales, typical symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.[14] In cultural terms, this is what Primo Levi called the trauma to recall the trauma. A survivor of a devastating event himself, a witness, and a writer, Levi devoted many of his reflections to recalling trauma and to its overwhelming effects on individuals' lives, as well as on the act of testimony. In *The Drowned and the Saved*, he wrote about the "memories of extreme experiences" as follows:

> All or almost all the factors that can obliterate or deform the mnemonic record are at work: the memory of a trauma suffered or inflicted is itself traumatic, because recalling it is painful or at least disturbing. A person who has been wounded tends to block out the memory [of the trauma] so as not to renew the pain.
>
> In questo caso sono all'opera tutti o quasi i fattori che possono obliterare o deformare la registrazione mnemonica: il ricordo di un trauma, patito o inflitto, è esso stesso traumatico, perché richiamarlo duole o almeno disturba: chi è stato ferito tende a rimuovere il ricordo per non rinnovare il dolore.[15]

The creative process described by Shalamov and Sirotinskaia appears very close to the sudden emerging of trauma at the unconscious level, or the "imposing of trauma" as recalled by Cathy Caruth, who has focused on trauma and its impact on culture, specifically on literature.[16] In the introduction to one of her most important works, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, specifically concerning the impact of trauma on the representation of traumatic events, she took up an important aspect related to trauma: the effect of trauma on the mind and on the experience of time:

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14 This is how they are described by the British National Health Service: "Re-experiencing is the most typical symptom of PTSD. This is when a person involuntarily and vividly relives the traumatic event in the form of: flashbacks; nightmares; repetitive and distressing images or sensations; physical sensations, such as pain, sweating, feeling sick or trembling," accessed October 10, 2020, https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/symptoms/.

15 Primo Levi, *Opere* (Torino: 1997), vol. 2, 1007. English translation: Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: 2017), 14.

16 In addition to *Unclaimed Experience. Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: 1996), see also Cathy Caruth, *Empirical Truths and Critical Fictions: Locke, Wordsworth, Kant, Freud* (Baltimore: 1991) and her *Literature in the Ashes of History* (Baltimore: 2013).

> The originary meaning of trauma itself [is] the Greek *trauma*, or 'wound', originally referring to an injury inflicted on a body. In its later usage, and most centrally in Freud's text the term trauma is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind. But what seems to be suggested by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is that the wound of the mind—the breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world—is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that … is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor.[17]

Repetitiveness is a key concept in Caruth's theory of trauma. The trauma's "imposing" itself and thus becoming available to consciousness through repetitive actions and nightmares seems relevant to the difference between Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn, particularly regarding their creative processes, as described by the authors in the passages quoted above. Whereas Solzhenitsyn could store in his mind an idea for a *povest'* set in a labor camp for nine years and work on it for 40 days in a row, Shalamov seemed to get traumatic flashbacks which he would then try to put on paper in the form of a tale. And although, according to his own words, Shalamov evoked these flashbacks in order to use them for his tales, he seemed to have no control over them.

> All this is pushed out of the brain by itself, just as the push of the heart muscle. All this is formed inside by itself, and every obstacle causes pain. Then the headache subsides, but at that point you will not be able to write anything. The spring has dried up.
>
> Из мозга все это выталкивается само – на манер толчка сердечной мышцы, – все это формируется внутри само, а всякое препятствие – причиняет боль. Потом головная боль стихает, но ты уже ничего не запишешь – родник иссяк.[18]

These eruptions of inspiration, together with the author's inability to modify the text at a later stage, recall the studies of Dominick LaCapra, who took a more clinical approach to trauma in tackling the issue of its representation:

17 Idem, *Unclaimed Experience*, 3–4.
18 Shalamov, "O moei proze," 497.

> Trauma brings about a dissociation of affect and representation: one disorientingly feels what one cannot represent; one numbingly represents what one cannot feel. Working through trauma involves the effort to articulate or rearticulate affect and representation in a manner that may never transcend, but may to some viable extent counteract, a reenactment, or acting out, of that disabling dissociation.[19]

If we analyze the authors' creative processes in the light of LaCapra's words, the intensity of the traumatic flashbacks as recounted by both Shalamov and Sirotinskaia seems very distant from what Solzhenitsyn appears to have felt during his creative process as recounted in his 1982 interview, where no traces of dissociation seem evident. I return to the concept of working through and acting out trauma later; here let me point out how clinical analyses of trauma may offer other insights that not only sustain LaCapra's claims, but expand them on the ground of the different intensity of trauma and its effect on the individual. In a text based on their research on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but mainly aimed at informing the general public on trauma, Sword and Zimbardo state:

> A traumatic experience that involves most or all of the senses—sight, hearing, smell, physical pain—as well as emotions, speech and thought, is stored in multiple regions throughout your brain … And just as you can suffer from a little to a lot of depression or anxiety, you can suffer from minimal to extreme degrees of PTSD. If a traumatic event is extreme, it becomes a long-lived deeply embedded memory as opposed to a short-term memory like what you had for lunch last Tuesday. A person who suffers from minimal PTSD will probably get better over time without therapy. For instance if they were in a fender bender, they will get their car fixed so they don't think about the accident every time they see the car. In time they will be able to drive by the accident site without constantly thinking of the 'what ifs': What if I had left home five minutes earlier? What if I had taken a different route to work? But if you have been brutally physically assaulted and raped, no amount of time will ever completely erase the trauma if you don't get help. You start adjusting your thoughts and routines around these dark memories and the emotions they evoke. And these adjustments cost you dearly.[20]

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19 Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: 2000), 42.

20 Rosemary K. M. Sword and Philip Zimbardo, "Your Brain on Trauma," *Psychology Today*. Online resource, accessed May 23, 2018, https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/the

The study of the impact of trauma on Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn can be used to analyze their styles by examining the categories of "acting out" and "working through" established by LaCapra who, in another passage of his book, explains in further detail the difference between these two stages which might occur when dealing with trauma:

> In post-traumatic acting out … one is haunted or possessed by the past and performatively caught up in the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes—scenes in which the past returns and the future is blocked or fatalistically caught up in melancholic feedback loop. In acting out, tenses implode, and it is as if one were back there in the past reliving the traumatic scene. … Working through is an articulatory practice: to the extent one works through trauma, one is able to distinguish between past and present and to recall in memory that something happened to one back then while realizing that one is living here and now with opening to the future.[21]

If we accept Solzhenitsyn's and Shalamov's words on their creative process as truth, I argue that, because of the different intensity of trauma suffered, Shalamov's creative process of writing trauma is based on "acting out trauma," whereas that of Solzhenitsyn is based on "working through trauma." This is indicated by the use of tenses in these works.

In the *Gulag Archipelago*, Solzhenitsyn describes witnessing a *vlasovets*[22] undergoing torture:

> In East Prussia, a trio of captured Vlasov men was being marched along the roadside a few steps away from me. At that moment a T-34 tank thundered down the highway. Suddenly one of the captives twisted around and dived underneath the tank. The tank veered, but the edge of its track crushed him nevertheless. The broken man lay writhing, bloody foam coming from his mouth. And one could certainly understand him! He preferred a soldier's death to being hanged in a dungeon.
>
> …

-time-cure/201211/your-brain-trauma. Sword and Zimbardo are authors, together with Richard M. Sword, of the monograph *The Time Cure: Overcoming PTSD with the New Psychology of Time Perspective Therapy* (San Francisco: 2012).

21 LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 21.

22 The *vlasovtsy* were soldiers who fought with the Russian Liberation Army under the command of General Andrei Vlasov, siding with Nazi Germany against the USSR. They were all repressed. See Kirill Aleksandrov, *Armiia generala Vlasova 1944–45* [The Army of General Vlasov] (Moscow: 2006).

I recall with shame an incident I observed during the liquidation—in other words, the plundering—of the Bobruisk encirclement, when I was walking along the highway among wrecked and overturned German automobiles, and a wealth of booty lay scattered everywhere. German cart horses wandered aimlessly in and out of a shallow depression where wagons and automobiles that had gotten stuck were buried in the mud, and bonfires of booty were smoking away. Then I heard a cry for help: "Mr. Captain! Mr. Captain!" A prisoner on foot in German britches was crying out to me in pure Russian. He was naked from the waist up, and his face, chest, shoulders, and back were all bloody, while a sergeant *osobist*, a Security man, seated on a horse, drove him forward with a whip, pushing him with his horse. He kept lashing that naked back up and down with the whip, without letting him turn around, without letting him ask for help. He drove him along, beating and beating him, raising new crimson welts on his skin.

And this was not one of the Punic Wars, nor a war between the Greeks and the Persians! Any officer, possessing any authority, in any army on earth ought to have stopped that senseless torture. In any army on earth, yes, but in ours? Given our fierce and uncompromising method of dividing mankind? (If you are not with us, if you are not our own, etc., then you deserve nothing but contempt and annihilation.) So I was afraid to defend the Vlasov man against the *osobist*. I said nothing and I did nothing. I passed him by as if I could not hear him … so that I myself would not be infected by that universally recognized plague. (What if the Vlasov man was indeed some kind of supervillain? Or maybe the *osobist* would think something was wrong with me? And then?) Or, putting it more simply for anyone who knows anything about the situation in the Soviet Army at that time: would that *osobist* have paid any attention to an army captain? So the *osobist* continued to lash the defenseless man brutally and drive him along like a beast.

This picture will remain etched in my mind forever. This, after all, is almost a symbol of the Archipelago. It ought to be on the jacket of this book.[23]

В Восточной Пруссии в нескольких шагах от меня провели по обочине тройку пленных власовцев, а по шоссе как раз грохотала Т-тридцать четверка. Вдруг один из пленных вывернулся, прыгнул и

23 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918–1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*, trans. Thomas P. Whitney, vol. 1 (New York: 1973), 255–257.

> ласточкой шлепнулся под танк. Танк увильнул, но все же раздавил его краем гусеницы. Раздавленный еще извивался, красная пена шла на губы. И можно было его понять! Солдатскую смерть он предпочитал повешению в застенке.
>
> …
>
> Я со стыдом вспоминаю, как при освоении (то есть, разграбе) бобруйского котла я шел по шоссе среди разбитых и поваленных немецких автомашин, рассыпанной трофейной роскоши, – и из низинки, где погрязли утопленные повозки и машины, потерянно бродили немецкие битюги и дымились костры из трофеев же, услышал вопль о помощи: "Господин капитан! Господин капитан!" Это чисто по-русски кричал мне о защите пеший в немецких брюках, выше пояса нагой, уже весь окровавленный – на лице, груди, плечах, спине, – а сержант-особист, сидя на лошади, погонял его перед собою кнутом и наседанием лошади. Он полосовал его по голому телу кнутом, не давая оборачиваться, не давая звать на помощь, гнал его и бил, вызывая из кожи новые красные ссадины.
>
> Это была не пуническая, не греко-персидская война! Всякий, имеющий власть, офицер любой армии на земле должен был остановить бессудное истязание. Любой – да, а – нашей?… При лютости и абсолютности нашего разделения человечества? (Если не с нами, не наш и т. д. – то достоин только презрения и уничтожения.) Так вот, я СТРУСИЛ защищать власовца перед особистом, я НИЧЕГО НЕ СКАЗАЛ И НЕ СДЕЛАЛ, Я ПРОШЕЛ МИМО, КАК БЫ НЕ СЛЫША – чтоб эта признанная всеми чума не перекинулась на меня (а вдруг этот власовец какой-нибудь сверхзлодей?… а вдруг особист обо мне подумает..? а вдруг..?) Да проще того, кто знает обстановку тогда в армии – стал ли бы еще этот особист слушать армейского капитана? И со зверским лицом особист продолжал стегать и гнать беззащитного человека как скотину.
>
> Эта картина навсегда передо мною осталась. Это ведь – почти символ Архипелага, его на обложку книги можно помещать.[24]

In describing a traumatic experience, Solzhenitsyn uses verb tenses in a linear way. He describes an event in the past and it remains all the time in the past, an event that is not happening in the present. The boundaries between past

24 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Arkhipelag Gulag, 1918–1956* [The Gulag Archipelago, 1918–1956] (Paris: 1973), vol. 1, 260–262.

and present are clear: the only times Solzhenitsyn uses the present tense occur when he speaks to his reader in the continuous form of dialogue/confession he adopts throughout the book. And it is striking that he uses the word "вспоминаю" ("I recall")—yet another sign of his awareness of the fact that he is writing in the present about a moment in the past.

Shalamov's use of tenses is more complex. While in many stories he shows a regular command of the tenses, in some others they are blurred, especially in stories focused on traumatic events, like the story "Inzhener Kiselev" (Engineer Kiselev), part of the cycle *Artist lopaty* (Artist of the Spade). At the start of the tale, the narrator recalls a character he met in the past, using the appropriate tenses:

> I could not understand the soul of the engineer Kiselev. He was a young, thirty-year-old engineer, an energetic worker who had just graduated and come to the Far North to work out a compulsory three-year practical training. He was one of the few bosses who would read Pushkin, Lermontov, Nekrasov, or at least this is what his library card would say. And most importantly, he was not a party member, therefore he came to the Far North not to check that something would be in accordance with the orders from above. Never having met prisoners before on his life path, Kiselev outscored all other perpetrators in evilness.
>
> Beating personally the prisoners, Kiselev would set an example to his young officers, brigadiers and guards. After work Kiselev could not calm down. He would walk from one barrack to another looking for a person to humiliate, hit, beat unmercifully. There were two hundred people at Kiselev's disposal. A dark, sadistic thirst for murder lived in Kiselev's soul and, in the autocracy and lawlessness of the Far North, it found a way out, a way to develop, to grow. … Many prisoners had on their faces the iron of the soles and heels of Kiselev's boots.

> Я не понял души инженера Киселева. Молодой, тридцатилетний инженер, энергичный работник, только что кончивший институт и приехавший на Дальний Север отрабатывать обязательную трехлетнюю практику. Один из немногих начальников, читавший Пушкина, Лермонтова, Некрасова – так его библиотечная карточка рассказывала. И самое главное – беспартийный, стало быть, приехавший на Дальний Север не затем, чтобы что-то проверять, в соответствии с приказами свыше. Никогда не встречавший ранее арестантов на своем жизненном пути, Киселев перещеголял всех палачей в своем палачестве.

> Самолично избивая заключенных, Киселев подавал пример своим десятникам, бригадирам, конвою. После работы Киселев не мог успокоиться – ходил из барака в барак, выискивая человека, которого он мог бы безнаказанно оскорбить, ударить, избить. Таких было двести человек в распоряжении Киселева. Темная садистическая жажда убийства жила в душе Киселева и в самовластии и бесправии Дальнего Севера нашла выход, развитие, рост. … Немало заключенных видели у своего лица железки на подошвах и каблуках киселевских сапог.[25]

After introducing Kiselev and describing generally his violent deeds, Shalamov gets to the very heart of the tale by introducing a specific violent event he had witnessed. It is at this point that the narration becomes personal—judging by the text, it seems that Shalamov knew the prisoner he named "Zel'fugarov"—and switches to the present tense.

> Who lies today under the boots of Kiselev? Who is sitting on the snow? It's Zel'fugarov. He is my neighbor from the top of the compartment of the wagon of the train going straight to hell, an eighteen-year-old boy of weak build and worn muscles, prematurely worn out. Zel'fugarov's face is flooded with blood, and I recognize my neighbor only thanks to his black bushy eyebrows—Zel'fugarov is a Turk, a counterfeiter.

> Сегодня кто лежит под сапогами Киселева, кто сидит на снегу? Зельфугаров. Это мой сосед сверху по вагонному купе поезда, идущего прямым ходом в ад, – восемнадцатилетний мальчик слабого сложения с изношенными мускулами, преждевременно изношенными. Лицо Зельфугарова залито кровью, и только по черным кустистым бровям узнаю я своего соседа: Зельфугаров – турок, фальшивомонетчик.[26]

Shalamov then returns to the past tense in describing Zel'fugarov's activities as a counterfeiter, but uses the present when referring to the scenes in the barracks where they had lived:

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25 Varlam Shalamov, *Kolymskie rasskazy. Izbrannye proizvedeniia* [The Kolyma Stories: Selected Works] (St Petersburg: 2013), 348–349.

26 Ibid.

> "We used to make good money, you would not distinguish it from the real stuff," Zel'fugarov would whisper in the barrack, excited by his memories, in a warmed tent, where a plywood frame is placed inside the tarpaulin—such inventions do exist. His father and mother and two of Zel'fugarov's uncles were executed, but the boy was still alive—however, he would soon die from the boots and fists of engineer Kiselev.

> – Мы делали деньги хорошие – ничем не отличить от настоящих, – взволнованный воспоминаниями, шептал Зельфугаров в бараке – в утепленной палатке, где внутри брезента ставится фанерный каркас – изобретения и такие бывают. Расстреляны отец и мать, два дяди Зельфугарова, а мальчик остался жив – впрочем, он скоро умрет, порукой тому сапоги и кулаки инженера Киселева.[27]

And when Shalamov returns to the description of the traumatic event, the narration is kept in the present tense:

> I lean over Zel'fugarov, and he spits out his broken teeth into the snow. His face swells up before my eyes.

> Я наклоняюсь над Зельфугаровым, и тот выплевывает прямо на снег перебитые свои зубы. Лицо его опухает на глазах.[28]

Many of the *Kolyma Stories* contain this 'blurred' use of tenses,[29] which appears connected not only to what LaCapra describes, but also to a type of dissociation related to post-traumatic stress disorder. Homes et al. (2005) describe two types of symptoms related to PTSD dissociation: symptoms of "distress" ("first-person symptoms": alienation, absence, de-personalization)

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 See, for instance, the end of the story "In the Admission Room" [V priemnom pokoe] where, after using the past tense throughout, Shalamov switches to the present tense within the space of one sentence and then keeps the narration in the present tense until the end: "Раньше Шицель *работала* при больнице, но анкета *увела* ее на прииск и на смерть. Клавдия Ивановна *идет* досматривать постановку лагерной культбригады, а фельдшер *ложится* спать" ("In the past, Shitsel' *had worked* at the hospital, but her records *sent* her to the mines and to death. Klavdiia Ivanovna *goes* to see the end of the show by the camp's Culture Brigade, and the paramedic *goes* to sleep"). Varlam Shalamov, *Levyi Bereg: Rasskazy* [The Left Bank: Stories] (Moscow: 1989), 265–268. Italics added.

and symptoms of "compartmentalization" ("third-person symptoms": dissociative amnesia, traumatic flashbacks, lack of control of emotions and movements).[30] The symptoms of compartmentalization seem to be at the core of the creative process of the *Kolyma Stories* as recounted by Shalamov and Sirotinskaia, and as confirmed by the analysis of the use of tenses in some of the *Kolyma Stories*: if they were born from the sudden resurgence of a traumatic flashback that caused a lack of control over emotions, we may hypothesize that Shalamov could have reacted to these symptoms by trying to inscribe the resurfaced trauma into the form of a tale, during which he would re-live the trauma, an event which then might have resulted in both the blurring of tenses and the limited length of the tales—indicating the extent to which his traumatized mind could bear the intensity of the trauma. In another passage of the book and later in time, LaCapra hinted at the fact that the two stages of "working through" and "acting out" could be complementary, and if we accept that, we may argue that many of the *Kolyma Stories* seem to be Shalamov's attempt to "work through" the trauma through acting out:

> With respect to traumatic losses, acting out may be a necessary condition of working through, at least for victims. Possession by the past may never be fully overcome or transcended, and working through may at the best enable some distance or critical perspective that is acquired with extreme difficulty and not achieved once and for all.[31]

This difficulty clearly depends on the intensity of trauma, on the effect of reliving it, which might explain also Shalamov's inability to edit his tales.

The use of tenses can be further analyzed in the non-fictional autobiographical texts written by these two authors. It is striking that, when writing autobiographical texts about non-traumatic events, Shalamov uses tenses in a linear way. The first two chapters of his *Vospominaniia* (Memoirs), on his childhood and experiences in Moscow in the 1920s and 1930s, are written in past tense. When Shalamov turns to recounting his life in the Kolyma, the tenses start to blur: the deeper he gets into his memories of trauma, the more the tense switches from present to past, as shown in this short passage:

> A naive man, I was holding a pouch in my hands. A young criminal snatched it from my hands and ran. I ran after him too, but could not

30 Emily A. Holmes et al., "Are there two qualitatively distinct forms of dissociation? A review and some clinical implications," *Clinical Psychology Review* 25 (2005), 1–23.

31 LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 70.

make a jump to grab my prey. The boy jumped into the barrack, I followed him and was immediately deafened by the blow of a log on the head and thrown out into the street from the barrack. I remember this blow because I still had some human feelings in me: revenge, fury. Then all this was knocked out, lost.

I also remember how I crawl behind a tank truck carrying sunflower oil, and I cannot break a cistern with a crowbar—I do not have enough strength, and I throw the crowbar. But the experienced criminal's hand grabs the scrap, hits the cistern, and the oil flows into the snow, which we catch in the snow, swallowing directly with the snow. … I feel that I'm losing weight, I'm losing weight, I'm just drying every day—there's not enough food, I'm hungry all the time.

Наивный человек, я держал кисет в руках. Мальчик-блатарь вырвал у меня из рук и побежал. Я побежал за ним тоже, не мог сделать прыжка, чтобы схватить свою добычу. Мальчик вскочил в барак, я за ним и тут же был оглушен ударом полена по голове – и выброшен на улицу из барака. Вот этот удар вспомнился потому, что во мне были еще какие-то человеческие чувства – месть, ярость. Потом все это было выбито, утрачено.

Помню я также, как ползу за грузовиком-цистерной, в которой подсолнечное масло, и не могу пробить ломом цистерну – сил не хватает, и я бросаю лом. Но опытная рука блатаря подхватывает лом, бьет цистерну, и на снег течет масло, которое мы ловим в снегу, глотая прямо со снегом. … Я чувствую, что я худею, худею, прямо сохну день ото дня – пищи не хватает, все время хочется есть.[32]

With Solzhenitsyn, the situation seems to be different. He did not go through the "traumatic creative processes" experienced by Shalamov—at least, he never spoke or wrote about it, which would be unusual indeed, considering the amount of space he devoted to his own writing process during his lifetime. Almost all of Solzhenitsyn's fictional writings of trauma share the same characteristic: *V kruge pervom* (In The First Circle) and *Rakovyi korpus* (Cancer Ward), as well as the parts devoted to traumas Solzhenitsyn suffered himself or witnessed—all maintain the conventional usage of tenses.[33] There is only

32 Shalamov, *Vospominaniia*, 164.

33 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *V kruge pervom: roman* [In The First Circle: A Novel] (Paris: 1969); Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Rakovyi korpus: povest' v dvukh chastiakh* [Cancer Ward: A Tale in Two Parts] (Paris: 1968).

one exception, and it is "Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha," in which tenses switch constantly from past to present.[34] If we accept Young's theory on the narrative devices employed by Shalamov, perhaps, in a similar way, Solzhenitsyn may have chosen this stylistic device in order to bring the reader closer to the events by positioning them in the present. However, if we accept the theory of trauma discussed here, we may hypothesize that "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich" concerned a more severe experience of trauma than his other writings of trauma (the experience in Ekibastuz might have caused a harsher trauma than those in Marfino and in the cancer ward in Tashkent), and that the blurring of tenses might have occurred at the subconscious level during the phase of "acting out." Luba Jurgenson refers to "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich" as a work relating to the "series 1": a book more directly related to the act of witnessing the experience lived by the author in the camps rather than a piece of reflection on it, as in the "series 2" works.[35]

We find the same in Solzhenitsyn's non-fictional writings on his experiences of trauma. The traumatic events witnessed or suffered and recounted in the *Gulag Archipelago*—such as the sleeplessness endured during his trial[36]—are all in the past tense. The same applies to whenever he mentions or hints at his life in the camp in *Bodalsia telenok s dubom* (The Oak and the Calf): there are 133 occurrences, and each time the events are recounted with a clear distinction between the past (when the events occurred) and the present (when they are recounted). There is only one instance in which the tenses are blurred: this is when Solzhenitsyn, after storing in his brain the literary works he composed orally during detention, is faced with the news that he has only three weeks to live because of the cancer he suffered from, an instance that Solzhenitsyn describes as "a dreadful moment."

> This was a dreadful moment in my life: to die on the threshold of freedom, to see all I had written, all that gave meaning to my life thus far, about to perish with me. The peculiarities of the Soviet postal censorship made it impossible for me to cry out for help: Come quickly, take what I have written, save it!
>
> Это был страшный момент моей жизни: смерть на пороге освобождения и гибель всего написанного, всего смысла прожитого до

34 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha* [One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich] (London: 1962).

35 Luba Jurgenson, *L'expérience concentrationnaire est-elle indicible?* (Paris: 2003), 21–22.

36 Solzhenitsyn, *Arkhipelag Gulag*, 142–152 (The Gulag Archipelago, vol. 1, 133–143).

> тех пор. По особенностям советской цензуры никому вовне я не мог крикнуть, позвать: приезжайте, возьмите, спасите моё написанное![37]

With the exception of the passage quoted above and "Ivan Denisovich," Solzhenitsyn uses tenses in a linear fashion. This would indicate that, according to LaCapra's theory, his works are a "linear working through trauma" that allowed him to "enable some distance or critical perspective" to the point that he could write not only about his personal traumas, but also "carry" those of other people. In a way, he was the instrument of a collective working-through of the trauma of the Gulag.

Conclusions

The analysis provided here may not be sufficient to prove the correlation between the intensity of trauma and literary form—a broader, more in-depth study on the whole literary corpus is needed. Still, it does shed some light on the topic. We have seen how theories derived from trauma studies concerning the relationship between trauma and representation—as well as those concerning the effect trauma has on the individual when it resurfaces and the different effects of trauma based on its intensity—can be of great use to the analysis of Gulag literature, as well as to studies of Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn. However, it also seems that, as far as their writings of trauma are concerned, the latter seemed to have had a less traumatic experience in the labor camps, which—according to theories of the effect of PTSD on representation—may explain why Solzhenitsyn could write lengthy works inspired by the Gulag and Shalamov could not. Again, however, a broader study is needed here. Solzhenitsyn's traumatic experiences seemed to have been properly worked through, although a question mark remains about *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* and the passage quoted from *The Oak and the Calf*. By contrast, Shalamov seems to have been heavily traumatized. Theories on PTSD, could explain how the creative process involved in producing the *Kolyma Stories* was influenced by trauma—as if Shalamov, haunted by the repetitive appearance of traumatic flashbacks, wrote tales to permit the performative "acting out" of his traumas. Read against the background of some theories on the representation of trauma

37 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Bodalsia telenok s dubom* (Paris: 1975), 8. English translation by Harry Willets: *The Oak and the Calf* (London: 1980), 3.

in persons suffering from PTSD, Shalamov's own recollections about his creative process seem to support this hypothesis.

Therefore, trauma studies can offer new perspective on two identifiable differences between these two authors: the length of their writings of trauma, and their use of tenses. Shalamov wrote extensively on his creative process and on his choice of literary form, but was not aware of modern theories of trauma. The analysis of the impact of trauma on his writing process can complement Shalamov's *autocritical* notes, placing them into a wider, more nuanced perspective. Analysis of his use of repetitions, as well as his use of alter egos, may draw on studies on the dissociation caused in persons suffering from PTSD by the repetitive occurrence of traumatic flashbacks. In a 2017 article, Sabine Schönfeld and Anke Ehlers underline how "intrusive memories of trauma in PTSD appear to lack time perspective, that is, by being experienced as rather present as in the past ('nowness') … The 'nowness' of trauma memories might point to a lack of time perspective or 'autonoetic awareness' in the PTSD group."[38] Further studies could seek to ascertain whether this lack of autonoetic awareness can be connected to the use of alter-egos in Shalamov and other authors. This is just one of many issues suitable for further analysis through the lens of trauma studies.

More broadly, such an approach could pave the way to an innovative approach to understanding Gulag literature: it could indicate that, when literary works are inspired by severely traumatic events, their length and form may derive from the intensity of the trauma. In *Vishera*, Shalamov was able to create a "working through" text about a less traumatic experience in the Gulag, and then wrote longer tales among his *Kolyma Stories*—usually concerning other people instead of first-hand experience, or about less-intense experiences of trauma.[39] It is also striking to note that other heavily traumatized authors have left shorter literary texts, often made up of fragmented memories, whereas works by less traumatized authors are often longer, as with the works of Andrei Siniavskii and Solzhenitsyn.

Shalamov's use of tenses in some of the *Kolyma Stories*, characterized by his constant switching between the past and the present in ways that recall LaCapra's description of acting out trauma ("In acting out, the past is performatively regenerated or relived as if it were fully present rather than

38 Sabine Schönfeld, Anke Ehlers, "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Autobiographical Memories in Everyday Life," *Clinical Psychological Science*, 5 (2) (2017), 325–340 at 326 and 335.

39 Varlam Shalamov, *Vyshera. Antiroman* [Vishera: An Antinovel] (Moscow: 1989), in Varlam Shalamov, *Chetvertaia Vologda* [The Fourth Vologda] (Vologda: 1994).

represented in memory and inscription, and it hauntingly returns as the repressed"[40])—hints at another key feature of Shalamov's writings of trauma. His tales often start *in medias res*—just as when, describing an event in the past, he consistently "falls into" the present. The distinctive beginnings of the tales might therefore be inscribed within the theory of trauma as yet another feature of his "acting out." Moreover, the writer's difficulty in returning to texts once they were written—as with his vindication concerning the "free manifestation of the writer's soul" as a creative method, as in the passage quoted above—might conceal an ordeal against trauma, the difficulty of returning to a trauma that, as put by Leigh Gilmore, had been "expelled" after being put on paper.[41]

A similar situation can be found in the works of another heavily traumatized author, Lev Feigelevich Konson, who spent nine years in some of the harshest camps of the Gulag system between 1943 and 1952. In his *Kratkie povesti* (Short Tales),[42] Konson presented a series of short stories sometimes consisting of a single sentence. Although, as noted by Alfred Gall,[43] Konson refused the role of literary author ("в литературе не разбираюсь," "I am not familiar with literature")[44] and clearly stated that he did not want to remember the past ("С прошлым покончено, его просто не было. Я вспоминать о нем не хочу и думать о нем не собираюсь," "The past is over, it just didn't exist. I don't want to remember and I won't think about it"),[45] he nevertheless composed texts about his traumatic experience. These are sometimes just fragments, snapshots of a moment of trauma. And just as in Shalamov's *Koyma Tales*, in Konson's writings of trauma the tenses are blurred:

> A funny case. Uncle Pasha cracked up laughing. The man next to him took the pipe from him to have a smoke. He smoked and died. The guys dragged the dead man into the medical unit, but Uncle Pasha bustles about, he wants to pick up the pipe.
> "He has my pipe, give my pipe back. Let me find it. Give my pipe back."

40 LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 70.

41 Leigh Gilmore, "Trauma and Life Writing," in *Encyclopaedia of Life Writing: Autobiographical and Biographical Forms*, ed. Margaretta Jolly (London: 2001), 885–887.

42 Lev Konson, *Kratkie povesti* [Short Tales] (Paris: 1983).

43 Alfred Gall, "Disconcerting Concision. Laconism as Principle of Text Organization: Leo Lipski (Dzień i noc) and Lev Konson (Kratkie povesti)," in (*Hi-*)*Stories of the Gulag. Fiction and Reality*, ed. F. Fischer von Weikersthal and K. Thaidigsmann (Heidelberg: 2016), 205–218.

44 Ibid., 87, English translation from Gall's article, at 213.

45 Ibid., 148, English translation from Gall's article, at 214.

> The guys pushed away Uncle Pasha, but he keeps climbing up to the dead man.
> The whole barrack laughed. What a weirdo.
>
> Забавный случай. Насмешил дядя Паша. Сосед взял у него трубку покурить. Покурил и умер. Ребята потащили покойника в санчасть, а дядя Паша суетится, все трубку хочет забрать.
> – У него моя трубка, отдайте трубку. Дайте я найду. Трубку мою отдайте.
> Ребята дядю Пашу отталкивают, а он все к покойнику лезет.
> Весь барак смеялся. Вот чудак.[46]

We find a similar tendency in Gulag poetry, especially in the poems written after liberation that recall a trauma, such as Andrei Aldan-Semenov's *Ia edu na Kolymu* (I Am Going to Kolyma),[47] where the narration switches from past to present tense ("– Я здесь в двадцатом партизанил, – / Сосед задумчиво сказал. … И словно с голоса чужого / Сосед болтает невпопад," "'I was a partisan here in the Twenties' / The neighbor said thoughtfully … And as if speaking with the voice of another one / The neighbor babbles out of nowhere"). However, in general, different rules apply to poetry, where rote learning and mnemonics play a major role in facing trauma, as explained by Mikhail Gronas.[48]

In conclusion, trauma studies can help in addressing some of the wider issues of Gulag literature, providing a perspective that sheds new light on other approaches on that theme, such as Leona Toker's studies on referentiality and reliability in the writings of Shalamov, or Luba Jurgenson's theories on the writing process in Gulag literature. If, as Jurgenson states, the "series 1" in Gulag literature are books that bear mainly a witnessing function and the "series 2" consists of reflective works, then we might have to reconsider the relationship

46 Ibid., 24. My translation.

47 Andrei Aldan-Semenov, *Ia edu na Kolymu* [I Am Going to Kolyma], in *Poeziia uznikov Gulaga* [Poetry of Gulag Prisoners], ed. S. Vilenskii (Moscow: 2005), 521.

48 Mikhail Gronas, "Why Did Free Verse Catch on in the West, but Not in Russia? On the Social Uses of Memorized Poetry," *Toronto Slavic Quarterly* 33 (2010), 166–213. He further developed his ideas in the monograph *Cognitive Poetics and Cultural Memory: Russian Literary Mnemonics* (New York: 2011). The quoted article was translated in Russian in the journal *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie* (issue 114, 2012) and was followed by a series of articles by other authors who debated the issue of the importance of mnemonization in Russian culture.

between the "series 0" (a pre-text, an oral record of events which then serves as draft), the "series 1" and the "series 2" in a new light.[49]

The differences between Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn are obviously not limited to trauma. However, it seems safe to state that their different experience of trauma had a deep impact on their writings, as well as on their worldviews. When combined with other approaches, trauma studies can help us improve our understanding of Gulag literature, as well as of other extratextual facts. When Shalamov read "Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha," the most prominent memories he had of life in the camp concerned his own experience in the Kolyma, where, as noted, a cat could never have been wandering around the camp without being killed and eaten. That was the first of many clashes. It was more than a cat that divided the two authors.

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49 See Leona Toker, *Return from the Archipelago. Narratives of Gulag Survivors* (Bloomington: 2000), 141–142; Jurgenson, *L'expérience concentrationnaire, est-elle indicible?*, 21–22.

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PART 2

Memory and Body

∴

CHAPTER 4

Why Did Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov Not Write *The Gulag Archipelago* Together?

Luba Jurgenson

1 Introduction

On August 30, 1964, as he was passing through Moscow, Solzhenitsyn suggested to Varlam Shalamov that they should meet at Veronika Turkina-Stein's apartment. He had just returned from the Estonian town of Võru, where he had worked out the structure of the *Arkhipelag Gulag* (The Gulag Archipelago). "Parts of it [the book] had been drafted, as well as, within these parts, many chapters, and I had accumulated abundant material for these chapters in progress."[1] Further: "I … took him [Shalamov] … to a large garden square nearby, where we lay down on the grass far from everyone and talked facing downward into the ground—the conversation was too secret."[2] Solzhenitsyn proposed to his "accomplice" that they should co-author *Arkhipelag Gulag*. According to Solzhenitsyn, there were two reasons for this: "I did not think that I would succeed alone, and I simply did not dare to exclude Varlam from such a work: he was fully entitled to participate in it."[3]

In the context of literary history, much research has been done on the divergence between Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn.[4] Their conflict was not only a

1 Unless otherwise stated, all translations from the Russian are my own. "Определились и Части его, и в Частях – многие главы, и множество уже натекшего материала я разнёс по этим заготовкам глав." Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "S Varlamom Shalamovym" [With Varlam Shalamov], *Novyi mir* 4 (1999). http://magazines.russ.ru/novyi_mi/1999/4/solgen.html, accessed February 21, 2018.

2 "Я … повел его … в соседний большой сквер, где и улеглись мы на травке в отдалении ото всех и говорили в землю – разговор был слишком секретен." Ibid.

3 "Я и не верил в возможность справиться мне одному, да и просто не смел с таким замыслом обойти Варлама: он имел все права на участие." Ibid.

4 See Elena Mikhailik, "Kot, begushchii mezhdu Solzhenitsynym i Shalamovym" [The Cat That Runs between Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov], in *Shalamovskii sbornik 3*, ed. Valery Esipov (Vologda: 2002), 101–114; Gérard Conio, *L'Art contre les masses* (Lausanne: 2003), 177–189; Valerii Esipov, *Shalamov* (Moscow: 2012), 243–265; idem, "V. Shalamov i 'Arkhipelag Gulag'" [Varlam Shalamov and *The Gulag Archipelago*], *Shalamovskii sbornik* 5, ed. Valerii Esipov

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problem of opposing personalities, contrary aesthetics and injustices, or bitterness arising from the inequalities in their literary destinies. Sharing a literary territory deeply committed the relation of both authors to the memory of the Gulag and its reconstruction within their works. This chapter endeavors to reconstruct some aspects of their encounter and division, their evolution as writers, and their conception of memory. Thereby, it aims to contribute to a better understanding of the complex movement from documentary work, which can be collective, towards an individual literary text. How does the passage quoted above reflect a conception of self (in both senses: subject of experience and literary instance)? How does a witness become an author? How does memory work? And how does the conception of space allow Shalamov to draw an unprecedented link between the icy mountains of Kolyma and the new prose he creates? Shalamov proved unwilling to serve as a co-author, and Solzhenitsyn's explanation of this may offer new keys to understanding the mechanisms of literary testimony.

2 Ivan Denisovich against Shalamov

Arkhipelag Gulag was originally planned as a collective work that would allow many individual voices of former prisoners to be heard. Solzhenitsyn would conduct this "choir," ensuring that there would be no dissonance. The *Archipelago* was intended to offer a full picture of the concentration camps, one in which every episode could be slotted into its place, like the elements of Mendeleev's periodic table. Solzhenitsyn himself mentions this in his preface:

> This book could never have been created by one person alone. In addition to what I myself was able to take away from the Archipelago—on the skin of my back, and with my eyes and ears—material for this book was given to me in reports, memoirs, and letters by 227 witnesses, whose names were to have been listed here.[5]
>
> Эту книгу непосильно было бы создать одному человеку. Кроме всего, что я вынес с Архипелага – шкурой своей, памятью, ухом и гла-

(Vologda: 2017); dossier "Solzhenitsyn/Shalamov: Two Visions of the Gulag," *Memories at Stake* 1, ed. Luba Jurgenson (September 2016), 49–93.

5 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, trans. Thomas P. Whitney (New York: 1974). https://archive.org/stream/TheGulagArkhipelago-Threevolumes/The-Gulag-Arkhipelago__vol1__I-II__Solzhenitsyn_djvu.txt/, accessed February 23, 2018.

> зом, материал для этой книги дали мне в рассказах, воспоминаниях и письмах: перечень 227 имен.[6]

In the Afterword (written in 1967) he reiterates:

> Instead of my writing this book alone, the chapters should have been shared among people with special knowledge, and we should then have met in editorial conference and helped each other to put it all in true perspective. But the time for that had not yet come. Those whom I asked to take responsibility for specific chapters would not do so, but instead offered stories, written or oral, for me to use as I pleased. I suggested to Varlam Shalamov that we write the whole book together, but also he declined.[7]

> Эту книгу писать бы не мне одному, а раздать бы главы знающим людям и потом на редакционном совете, друг другу помогая, выправить всю. Но время этому не пришло. И кому предлагал я взять отдельные главы – не взяли, а заменили рассказом, устным или письменным, в моё распоряжение. Варламу Шаламову предлагал я всю книгу вместе писать – отклонил и он.[8]

That day when, lying on the grass, Solzhenitsyn proposed to Shalamov that they undertake this joint work, he received a total refusal. "I enthusiastically explained the entire project and my proposal for collaboration: modify my plan if necessary, then share the chapters. And I met with unexpected refusal, immediate and categorical."[9] Solzhenitsyn was profoundly disappointed. Later, in his text "S Varlamom Shalamovym" (With Varlam Shalamov), he interpreted this response as a refusal to write something that would have no chances of being published. "Why would I write that? What good would it do to write it, if it gets left to lie around somewhere? He [Shalamov] understood: it would be impossible to publish such a book. He was evidently driven by

6 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Arkhipelag Gulag*, vol. 1 (Paris: 1989), 11.

7 Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, accessed February 23, 2018.

8 Solzhenitsyn, *Arkhipelag Gulag*, vol. 3, 526.

9 "Я изложил с энтузиазмом весь проект и моё предложение соавторства. Если нужно – поправить мой план, а затем разделить, кто какие главы будет писать. И получил неожиданный для меня – быстрый и категорический отказ." Solzhenitsyn, "S Varlamom Shalamovym."

the desire to become known."[10] To this disappointment, however, Solzhenitsyn added: "I was also relieved. I retained the individuality of my pen."[11]

The individual voices of prisoners would have to dissolve in this orchestra: these hidden narrators had mandated the author to represent them in the realm of literature. They remained shadows whose narrative came to us clothed in Solzhenitsian words. Their experience reached us without the original verbal wrappings.

In a sense, by contacting Shalamov about the possibility of working on a book together, Solzhenitsyn risked undermining his own project. Later, as his plans matured, he understood that nothing good would have come from such an alliance:

> He [Shalamov] did the right thing in refusing: we would have destroyed the book. It would be difficult to bring us together in the same book, our pens are so different. And how many principles, directions, apportioning assignments, differences of tone, deciding on paragraphs and phrases—we would have had to argue about, perhaps until we became exhausted. But at that moment the unity and joint coverage of our concentration camp experience had seemed more important to me.
>
> И хорошо, что Шаламов отказался, – только загубили бы мы книгу. Трудно нас сопрячь в одну книгу, очень мы разные перья. И о скольких принципах, направлениях, пропорциях, тоне, местах, абзацах и фразах пришлось бы нам спорить – пожалуй, до взаимного истощения. Но в тот момент мне казались важней – единство и совместный охват нашего лагерного опыта.[12]

According to Solzhenitsyn, the text he conceived was initially aimed as serving "the material" and he suggested the same principle to Shalamov. But their conception of the material and how to deal with it differed. Moreover, Solzhenitsyn was not satisfied with Shalamov's tales. This is not surprising, as evidenced in the aesthetic differences between the work of the two writers:

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10 "Зачем я буду это писать? Какая разница, что я напишу – и это будет лежать в каком-нибудь другом месте? Да ведь понятно ему было: такую книгу невозможно печатать." Ibid.

11 "Было и облегчение: я тоже ведь, таким образом, сохранял теперь индивидуальность пера." Ibid.

12 Solzhenitsyn, "S Varlamom Shalamovym."

> True, Shalamov's stories did not satisfy me artistically: in all of them I missed the characters, the faces, the past of these persons and some kind of individual view of life for everyone. … in his concentration camp stories, this was not specific … [there were] people who acted, but almost mere surnames, sometimes repeated from story to story … We may assume that this was Shalamov's intention: to show the cruel everyday life of the camp that grinds prisoners down, crushes them until they cease to be individuals, but mere tools to be used by the camp. Of course, he wrote about extreme suffering, extreme depersonalization—and how everything is reduced to the struggle for survival. But, firstly, I do not agree that all the features of an individual's personality and past life are definitively destroyed: this does not happen … And secondly, the past in Shalamov's tales is too one-dimensional, and I see this as a flaw in his writing. Moreover, in "Funeral Oration" it becomes clear that in all the characters of all the stories we see himself … they all are multiple versions of the same model. And the varying names are only a device to hide the biographical aspect.
>
> Правда, рассказы Шаламова художественно не удовлетворили меня: в них во всех мне не хватало характеров, лиц, прошлого этих лиц и какого-то отдельного взгляда на жизнь у каждого. В рассказах его … лагерных – действовали не конкретные … люди, а почти одни фамилии, иногда повторяясь из рассказа в рассказ … Предположить, что в этом и был замысел Шаламова: жесточайшие лагерные будни истирают и раздавливают людей, люди перестают быть индивидуальностями, а лишь палочками, которые использует лагерь? Конечно, он писал о запредельных страданиях, запредельном отрешении от личности – и всё сведено к борьбе за выживание. Но, во-первых, не согласен я, что настолько и до конца уничтожаются все черты личности и прошлой жизни: так не бывает … А во-вторых, это прошлое у Шаламова слишком сквозно, и я вижу тут изъян его пера. Да в "Надгробном слове" он как бы расшифровывает, что во всех героях всех рассказов – он сам … А тогда и понятно, почему они все – на одну колодку. А переменные имена – только внешний приём сокрыть биографичность.[13]

Solzhenitsyn considered Shalamov's work unsatisfactory with regard to a realistic concept that requires characters and biographical data. He found

13 Ibid.

Shalamov's depictions of the concentration camp to be fragmentary. And yet, in the *Archipelago*—and then in *Krasnoe koleso* (The Red Wheel)—Solzhenitsyn himself created a fragmented and hybrid text. Solzhenitsyn's epic of the camps was in a sense a laboratory of modernist writing that he mastered gradually. Having grown up in a very different literary landscape, that of classics and socialist realism, he overcomes this heritage not only in the form of the *Archipelago*, but also in the way, for example, that Ivan Denisovich migrates from the fictional text, "Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha" (One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich), to the *Archipelago*. First shown as a realistic hero, endowed with personal traits, biography and worldview, who is intended as a "*typical character* in *typical* circumstances," Ivan Denisovich turns into a witness, a narrative instance who is being used to confirm the authenticity of the author's account. His illusory commonness and ordinariness make him an ideal witness. Actually, Ivan Denisovich, with his "defamiliarized" vision, is not at all typical—as also the characters of classical literature, raised by criticism to the rank of "archetypes," are generally not typical.[14] In the *Archipelago*, Ivan Denisovich, who transmitted to the author his authority of witness, occasionally appears from behind the scenes, confirming that the author is not distorting the truth. Thus, Ivan Denisovich proves to be a far more legitimate candidate for co-authoring than Shalamov. Indeed, Solzhenitsyn's collaboration with him is asserted directly in the form of dialogs in the pages of the *Archipelago*, where Solzhenitsyn clearly opposes Ivan Denisovich, a peasant, a common man, to Shalamov, an intellectual, who could benefit from the help of the doctors and worked as a nurse himself:

> Shalamov says that the prisoner in camp could count only on the Medical Section and that he could not count on the work of his own hands, that he did not dare: this led to the grave. … The saying is true … In one season of hauling timber the strongest slogger would end up a hopeless last-legger himself. … So what other way out can we offer Ivan Denisovich if they are unwilling to take him on as a medical assistant [*like Shalamov, L.J.*] or a hospital attendant and also won't fake him a release from work for even one day? … Let Ivan Denisovich talk about them in his own words. For he has given them plenty of thought. He had the time.[15]

14 See Elena Mikhailik, "Odin? Den'? Ivana Denisovicha? Ili reforma jazyka?" [One? Day? Of Ivan Denisovich? Or a Language Reform?], *NLO*, no. 2 (2014), magazines.russ.ru/nlo/2014/126/30m.html, accessed January 31, 2018.

15 Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, accessed February 23, 2018.

> Говорит Шаламов, что только на одну санчасть и может рассчитывать в лагере арестант, а вот на труд своих рук он полагаться не может, не смеет: это – могила. … Пословица верна … Самый крепкий работяга за сезон выкатки леса доходит вчистую. … Но какой же другой выход мы можем предложить Ивану Денисовичу, если фельдшером его не возьмут, санитаром тоже, даже освобождения липового ему на один день не дадут? … Пусть он сам расскажет о них, он ведь и их обдумывал, время было.[16]

Solzhenitsyn writes for "the mute Russia," represented here by Ivan Denisovich, who can see (and narrate, through the voice of Solzhenitsyn) much more, and in a more relevant fashion, than Shalamov:

> "But for the 58s, early release for health is a closed door. During all the time these concentration camps have existed, they say that maybe three times, for a month apiece, prisoners sentenced under section 10 were released early for health, and then that door, too, was slammed shut.[17] And no one will take money from them, from the enemies of the people. … and they don't have any money, those 'politicians'."
> "What do you mean, Ivan Denisych, *they* don't have any?"
> "Well, all right, *we* don't have any…"[18]

> А Пятьдесят Восьмой актировка закрыта. Сколько лагеря стоят – раза три по месяцу, говорят, была актировка Десятому Пункту, да тут же и захлопывалась. И денег от них никто не возьмет, от врагов народа – ведь это свою голову класть взамен. Да у них и денег не бывает, у политиканов.
> – У кого это, Иван Денисыч, *у них*?
> – Ну, у нас…[19]

Thanks to Ivan Denisovich, "they" turns into "we." Rejecting the testimony of Shalamov, Solzenitsyn appropriates that of Ivan Denisovich and becomes himself part of this "we," a collective entity, as a true representation of the camp:

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16 Solzhenitsyn, *Arkhipelag Gulag*, 199–200.

17 Article 58 section 10 concerns crimes of anti-Soviet propaganda. It was for propaganda that Shalamov was sentenced to his second term at Kolyma in 1943, and this "lighter" paragraph enabled him to join doctor's assistant courses in Magadan.

18 Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, accessed February 23, 2018.

19 Solzhenitsyn, *Arkhipelag Gulag*, 202.

> "Well, Ivan Denisovich, what is there left that we haven't yet recounted? From the routine of our daily lives?"
> "Whooo! *We* haven't even begun. It would take as many years as [we][20] served to tell it all."[21]

> – Ну, Иван Денисович, о чем еще мы не рассказали? Из нашей повседневной жизни?
> – Ху-у-у! Еще и не начали. Тут столько лет рассказывать, сколько сидели.[22]

Clearly, the account of the concentration camp is deficient. But Ivan Denisovich has full knowledge of it, and the "we" shows that this knowledge is not individual but common. However, the author disposes of his testimony as he wishes: "Now just a minute there, just a minute, Ivan Denisych, that's all for another time."[23]

Through Ivan Denisovich, individual experience is transformed into a collective one: the diversity of conditions and the multiplicity of testimonies are constructed as a system. Polyphony is turned into a dialog between the author and the hero, in order to legitimize the submission of all participants in the book to a single author's voice.

3 Writing a Testimony Together

Naturally enough, for Shalamov it was unacceptable to metamorphose himself into such a "voice from the chorus," a mere character from Solzhenitsyn's text. Moreover, he had already had the experience of living with Solzhenitsyn at Solotcha, from where he fled when it became clear that there was no room for him beside Solzhenitsyn.[24] In general, it is difficult to imagine Shalamov as a co-author with anyone else. Hence, these lines from his letter to Dobrovol'skii on January 23, 1955, are especially surprising:

> I had a secret hope in the North over the past few years that, if fate were favorable to us, we would write a good book together, not memoirs, but

20 Translation is modified by me.
21 Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, accessed February 23, 2018.
22 Solzhenitsyn, *Arkhipelag Gulag*, vol. 2, 204.
23 "Подожди-подожди, Иван Денисыч, это – другой раз." *Arhkipelag Gulag*, vol. 2, 207.
24 Solzhenitsyn, however, provided a completely different account of this meeting. See Solzhenitsyn, "S Varlamom Shalamovym."

> a work of fiction in which our personal experience would enable us to depict people in a better way and to judge people. On many points we agree, and we understand the reasons for our dissimilarities. It is very difficult to be alone, you know. Memory, like feeling, weakens, melts.
>
> Имел я на Севере последние годы тайную надежду, что, если будет милостива судьба, напишем-ка с Вами вдвоем хорошую книгу, не мемуары, а такую выдумку, в которой наш личный опыт дал бы нам умение лучше показать людей и дал бы нам право судить людей. Во многих пунктах мы сходимся, причины несходства понимаем. Одному очень трудно, знаете. Память, как и чувство, слабеет, тает.[25]

"Memory weakens, melts." What does this mean? The letter is dated 1955; Shalamov is just beginning his creative career and, in fact will draw constantly from his memory material for the *Kolyma Stories*. In addition, he will describe the very function of memory. Further still, we can read in the essay "O moei proze" (On my Prose), written 16 years later:

> I clearly understand that I can resurrect in my memory the infinite number of pictures I have seen throughout all my sixty years—somewhere in my brain there are endless tapes with this information, and with an effort of will, I can bring myself to recall everything I have seen in my life, on any day and in any hour of my sixty years. Not for one past day, but for life. Nothing is erased from the brain.
>
> Я отчетливо понимаю, что в силах воскресить в своей памяти все бесконечное множество виденных за все шестьдесят лет картин – где-то в мозгу хранятся бесконечные ленты с этими сведениями, и волевым усилием я могу заставить себя вспомнить все, что я видел в жизни, в любой день ее и час моих шестидесяти лет. Не за один прошедший день, а за всю жизнь. В мозгу ничего не стирается.[26]

His fears proved unjustified, his memory was not weakened. But how to explain such a contradiction? It seems that such an endless, bottomless

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25 Shalamov, "Perepiska s A. Z. Dobrovol'skim" [Correspondence with Dobrovolskii], in Varlam Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh* [Collected Works in Six Volumes], vol. 6 (Moscow: 2013), 106.

26 Shalamov, "Perepiska s I. P. Sirotinskoi" [Correspondence with Irina Sirotinskaya], in *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 6, 496.

memory is precisely the result of the writer's gradual appropriation of his place in literature: his awareness of the uniqueness not only of his Kolyma experience, but also of the poetic experiment that he undertook.

There seem to be two possibilities here. The memory may wake up in the latter stages of the writing process—which would mean that memory, as a creative process, is not oriented towards the reconstruction of past, but rather towards the construction of future. Alternatively, and more plausibly, Shalamov's comprehension of memory changes as the conception of the *Kolyma Stories* matures. It seems that the idea of using somebody else's memoirs resulted from his focus on the reliability of testimony and the accuracy of facts. Nevertheless, he states that he would prefer to write "fiction," so he had apparently not yet elaborated his theory of the document. The idea of showing and judging people who seem so inconsistent with our vision of *Kolyma Stories* suggests that the unwritten book would probably have suited Solzhenitsyn more than the stories that he came to create—he would have found in it the characters and judgements of the author, out of which the subsequent stories developed. Literature probably appeared then to Shalamov as an explicit substitute for a non-existent legal space; it should conjure up a court and a trial of perpetrators—which did not take place in reality.

We can assume that the idea of a joint book, conceived by Shalamov as a sort of impossible opportunity, coincided with the birth of his own hypostasis as author, already understood as a claim for its own place in the literary process. The book (or the abstract idea of such a book) was conceived as a sort of realistic novel. This backdated "project" acted as a foil, revealing that Shalamov had already reflected on the failure of traditional realist aesthetics and had begun to elaborate a new approach to realism. At the same time, the characters (necessary in a realistic text) disappear before their incarnation in the text. The invitation to cooperate—or, rather, to regret the impossibility of doing so—served to expel the devil of "literary-ness," transforming the stories into a new type of document (which, does not necessarily preclude fiction). In this letter, Shalamov positions himself—and here his position resembles that of Solzhenitsyn—as facing a daunting task and in need of a co-author, to provide the material.

Is not the idea of a jointly written book one of the stages of the creation of a text? Tadeusz Borowski and Primo Levi started by working on a collaborative book, an attempt—and a temptation—to embody "otherness" by giving it a specific place in the text.[27] It may be that for both of these writers, letting

27 Leonardo Debenedetti and Primo Levi, *Report on the Sanitary and Medical Organization of the Monowitz Concentration Camp for Jews* (*Auschwitz—Upper Silesia*), trans. Judith

the voices of others emerge, so that their own voice is heard as the voice of another, is a necessary condition for writing about the concentration camp.

When Solzhenitsyn says of his co-authorship offer to Shalamov that "the time for it was not yet," this is perhaps not true: its time had already passed. For Shalamov, rejecting collaboration with Dobrovol'skii coincides with distancing personal memory from collective experience. Paradoxically, such individualization allows him to eliminate memory gaps ("memory" must be interpreted as a language). From this perspective, the task of the witness is not to re-create all the details of the experience, but to create a new prose, and a meta-text about memory processing and reconstructing the past of the concentration camps.

The conception of *Kolyma Stories* corresponds with Shalamov's birth as an author. When, in the early 1960s, Shalamov refused to write a book with Solzhenitsyn, he was already aware that he had a new contribution to make to Russian literature:

> Why do I not consider possible my personal cooperation with Solzhenitsyn? First of all, because I hope to say my personal word in Russian prose, and not appear in the shadow of such a businessman as Solzhenitsyn. I consider my own works in prose to be immeasurably more important for the country than all the poems and novels of Solzhenitsyn.
>
> Почему я не считаю возможным личное моё сотрудничество с Солженицыным? Прежде всего потому, что я надеюсь сказать своё личное слово в русской прозе, а не появиться в тени такого в общем-то дельца, как Солженицын. Свои собственные работы в прозе я считаю неизмеримо более важными для страны, чем все стихи и романы Солженицына.[28]

It is clear that Shalamov is revolted at the thought of appearing in someone else's shadow, especially when such a massive shadow as that of Solzhenitsyn.

Woolf (London: 2006). Original publication: *Dott. Leonardo Debenedetti, medico-chirurgo, Dott. Primo Levi, chimico, Rapporto sulla organizzazione igienico-sanitaria del campo di concentramento per Ebrei di Monowitz* (*Auschwitz–Alta Slesia*), *Minerva medica* 300–307 (July–December 1946), 534–544. Cf. the commentary of report by Philippe Mesnard in Primo Levi, *Rapport sur Auschwitz* (Paris: 2005), 9–47.

6643 Janusz Nel Siedlecki, 75817 Krystyn Olszewski, 119198 Tadeusz Borowski, *Byliśmy w Oświęcimiu* (Munich: 1946). See Luba Jurgenson, "Publication collective: création de 'l'autre' ou laboratoire de la singularité?" in *La Littérature testimoniale, ses enjeux génériques*, ed. Philippe Mesnard (Paris: 2017), 63–82.

28 Shalamov, "Zapisnyie knizhki 1960—pervoi poloviny 70-kh gg.," *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, 363.

Although the autobiographical instance is blurred and anonymous, which irritated Solzhenitsyn, the author at this stage of his personal itinerary is laying claim to his own space in literature, a space that he does not want to share with anyone. Perhaps his letter to Dobrovol'skii represents such a transition point in his work. Shalamov is concerned about his place in Russian literature, in the literary process from which he had disappeared two decades previously and to which he now returns as a debutant author—at an age at which another writer, of a different fate, had already achieved an extensive background. For Shalamov, this place is to be created out of nothing, regardless of whether the stories will be published—although that question starts to worry him, first gradually and then becoming more pressing during the 1960s, as evident in his letters and texts, for example, "My First Tooth."

4 The Space of Literature and the Author's Way towards It

To understand how Shalamov appropriates the literary space as an individual author, while also marking out in his texts the space of the Kolyma camp, let us turn to his "Po snegu"(Through the Snow), written in 1956 as a kind of literary manifesto:

> A man walks in front, sweating and swearing, barely able to place one foot in front of the other, constantly getting stuck in the deep, powdery snow. … Shoulder to shoulder, in a row, five or six men follow the man's narrow and uncertain track.[29]
>
> Впереди идет человек, потея и ругаясь, едва переставляя ноги, поминутно увязая в рыхлом глубоком снегу. … По проложенному узкому и неверному следу двигаются пять-шесть человек в ряд плечом к плечу.[30]

It is not clear from the story who is beating that track through the virgin snow. Nor, in this boundless space, is there anything to indicate that this is a concentration camp. No guard escort, no dogs, no barbed wire. The reader does not know whether the people walking in the snow are free or prisoners. Who

29 Shalamov, "Through the Snow," *trans. Robert Chandler and Nathan Wilkinson, Russian Short Stories from Pushkin to Buida, Penguin Classics* (*New York: 2005*), *320*.

30 Shalamov, "Po snegu," *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, 47.

are they? Members of a geological expedition, soldiers, *zeks* (prisoners)? The uninitiated reader will not learn anything about the Kolyma experience from this story, except that this is an experience of pioneers. But how to interpret the figure of the trailblazer? A person opens a new space and leaves marks on it: "a trail of uneven black pits."[31] This track opens the book of *Kolymskie rasskazy* (Kolyma Stories); it is this word that "was in the beginning": the concrete, spatial image of the word-trace. The final lines of the story clearly indicate that the virgin snow is meant as a comparison here with the whiteness of the blank page, and the trace left on it by the human foot with the text. The writer is creating new paths, opening up new lands. The story "Po snegu" represents a metaphorical solution to the problem. The writer states that there is a place where he and only he can create a new word: a trace on the snow. That is not to say that he claims a monopoly on that concentration camp, or even on the Kolyma theme: "The so-called 'camp theme' is a vast topic, one which can house one hundred writers like Solzhenitsyn, five such writers as Lev Tolstoy. And it will not be too crowded."[32]

In this statement the "camp theme" is presented precisely as a space in which writers should be housed, as in a communal apartment. Within this space Shalamov is guaranteed a special place, different from the others, because of the convergence between *material* and *form*. "I had such a supply of new points that I was not afraid of repetition. The material would have condoned any recurrence, but there were no repetitions. … my material would have saved any recurrence, but there were no repetitions."[33]

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31 "…отмечая свой путь неровными черными ямами," Shalamov, "Through the Snow," 320. Shalamov, "Po snegu," 47.

32 "Так называемая лагерная тема – это очень большая тема, где разместится сто таких писателей, как Солженицын, пять таких писателей как Лев Толстой. И никому не будет тесно." Shalamov, "O proze" [On Prose], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, 153.

33 "Я обладал таким запасом новизны, что не боялся никаких повторений. Материал мой спас бы любые повторения, но повторений не возникло." Shalamov, "Perepiska s I. P. Sirotinskoi," 486–487. On the subject of repetition in Shalamov's works, see Elena Volkova, "Povtory v prozaicheskikh tekstakh Shalamova kak porozhdenie novykh smyslov" [Iterations in the Prose Works of Shalamov as a Way of Creating New Meanings], in *Shalamovskii sbornik 3*, ed. Valerii Esipov (Vologda: 2002); Mikhail Mikheev, "Zagadka 'skvoznykh' personnazhei i peretekaniie siuzhetov v tekstakh Varlama Shalamova" [The enigma of "migrating" characters and wandering plots in Shalamov's texts], in *Varlam Shalamov v kontekste mirovoi literatury i sovetskoj istorii*, ed. Sergei Solov'ev (Moscow: 2013), 237–247; Elena Mikhailik, "Nezamechennaia revoliutsiia" [An Unnoticed Revolution], in *Antropologiia revoliutsii*, ed. Irina Prokhorova, Aleksandr Dmitriev, Il'ia Kukulin, and Mariia Maiofis (Moscow: 2009), 178–204; Luba Jurgenson, "Spur, Dokument, Prothese: Varlam Salamovs Erzählungen aus Kolyma" [Trace, Document, Prosthesis: Varlam

What kind of material is it? In the story "Po snegu," in which the writer initially marks out his territory, the "material" itself (the camp reality) is not immediately visible. This story contains important hidden information that becomes accessible only after reading another story, "Biznesmen" (The Businessman). Here we discover who is actually sent to beat the paths. This work is reserved for *samoruby*, the so-called *ruchkiny*,[34] self-mutilated people who had maimed themselves to avoid work in the mines:

> *Kolia's right hand had been torn off at the wrist by an explosion*. It was a *case* of *self-mutilation*. … For two months Kolia had sprinkled dirt on his wound to keep it infected. In the end, however, his youth had won out, and his days in the hospital were coming to an end. It was time to return to the mines. Kolia, however, was not afraid. What threat could the gold mines hold for him, a one-handed man? The time was gone where the one-handed men were forced to spend the entire working day in deep, loose, crystal snow, tramping down a path for people and tractors at the timber-clearing sites.[35]

> Правая кисть Колиной руки отстрелена взрывом. Коля – самострел, членовредитель. … Два месяца Коля боролся с заживлением раны, но молодые годы взяли свое – Коле уже недолго быть в больнице. Пора возвращаться на прииск. Но Коля не боится – что ему, однорукому, золотые забои? То время прошло, когда одноруких заставляли "топтать дорогу" для людей и тракторов в лесозаготовках, полный рабочий день в глубоком, рыхлом, хрустальном снегу.[36]

"Biznesmen" was written in 1962. Had it been planned in 1956? Did Shalamov already have a conception of the complex system of references and correspondences that he would create? Memory is oriented not only to the past and to the reconstruction of events: it is oriented also to the future, to an understanding of one's own design, the general architecture of the stories or collections. Probably a multi-level, meandering intertextuality appeared for the first time from the echoes between his verse and prose. Shalamov, with his

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Shalamov's *Kolyma Stories*], in *Das Lager schreiben, Varlam Salamov und die Aufarbeitung des Gulag*, ed. Manfred Sapper, *Osteuropa* 57, no. 6 (2007), 169–182.

34 From *ruka* (hand or arm).

35 Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales*, trans. John Glad, accessed February 20, 2018, books.google.fr/books?id=vD3BW7b5UgsC&pg=PT152&lpg=PT152&dq/.

36 Shalamov, "Biznesmen" [Businessman], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, 440.

tendency towards self-reflection, could not completely ignore the task of creating an "auto-commentary" which he had set for himself. The final sentence of "Po snegu" clearly refers to the situation of writing and the reception of the text: "The people on the tractors and horses, however, will be not writers but readers."[37] The metaphor of a phantom organ or prosthesis was born at that time in Shalamov's poetry, but in his stories it developed later, in particular in "Tifoznyi karantin" (Typhoid Quarantine) in 1959: the hand of its protagonist, Andreev, seems to be a prosthesis: it is curved and his fingers are held close together around the imaginary handle of a shovel. Also the tractor is a phantom, as, according to Shalamov, there were no tractors in Kolyma, only American bulldozers that were used to inter corpses.

The people portrayed in the first story form a procession of cripples, who, similar to Bruegel's blind men, are moving along the snow-covered Kolyma space: the very fact of leaving a trace—a metaphor for writing—is associated here with the loss of a member, especially the hand, the organ of writing. The pioneer is the one who is able to describe the hitherto unknown human state of being, that of the *dokhodiaga*, the singular existence between life and death. As Shalamov himself says: "Here people are depicted in an extremely important, *not yet described* state, when a person approaches a state close to that of dehumanization."[38] But the narration not only captures this state, it also represents a literary device. In this Shalamov follows the tradition of the avant-garde. Device and material merge, and the device, albeit in disguised form, is revealed to the reader. For example, in futurist aesthetics we can see from the manifest of Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh "Slovo kak takovoe" (The Word as Such): "The Futurist painters love to use parts of the body, its cross sections, and the Futurian wordwrights use chopped-up words, half words, and their odd artful combinations."[39] Not only Russian modernists, but also European avant-garde movements in general, discovered and used fragmented images of the human body as an allegory for the new art—some years before these

37 "…на тракторах и лошадях ездят не писатели, а читатели." Shalamov, "Po snegu," 47; Shalamov, "Through the Snow," 320.

38 "Здесь изображены люди в крайне важном, не описанном еще состоянии, когда человек приближается к состоянию, близкому к состоянию зачеловечности." Shalamov, "Perepiska s I. P. Sirotinskoi," 487.

39 Velimir Khlebnikov and Aleksei Kruchenyh, "The Word as Such," in *Russian Futurism through its Manifestoes, 1912–1928*, ed. Anna Lawton and Herbert Eagle (Ithaca, NY: 1988), 61. "Живописцы будетляне любят пользоваться частями тел, разрезами, а будетляне речетворцы разрубленными словами, полусловами и их причудливыми хитрыми сочетаниями." Velimir Khlebnikov, "Slovo kak takovoe" [The Word as Such], in idem, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh*, vol. 6 (Moscow: 2000–2006), 337.

images were to become reality in the trenches of the Great War. The relation between poetic device and experience of extreme violence appears, for example, in *La Main coupée* (The Bloody Hand) by Blaise Cendrars. Shalamov had probably not read Cendrars, but he knew and had read Vladimir Narbut, a Russian Acmeist poet who dedicated (like Cendrars) a poem to his own arm that he lost during the civil war.[40] Narbut, shot by the NKVD in a Kolyma concentration camp, may be seen as one of Shalamov's "doubles."[41]

Moreover, in Shalamov's creative process, memory becomes a device; recording becomes a literary method. The transition from the collective Kolyma experience—the road—to the individual trace—the path—results from a rethinking of the modernist method, which in turn forms the basis of the newly acquired memory. The "path"—in Russian, *tropa*—is certainly a "trope."[42]

So, mutilation—an important topic in Shalamov's aesthetic program—is included implicitly in "Po snegu," but remains unseen until it is revealed later to the reader. The cripple appears "behind the scenes," hidden at first reading. This is a technique used also in *Kolyma Stories*, where many things remain invisible to the reader. The short story form contributes to the presence in some texts of shadows, phantoms, which later, in other texts, become incarnate. Transformations are not made within the space of the story, but between the stories, in a spectral space: the novelty of the material results from its speaking out of nowhere. A discontinuous subject, wandering from one story to another, not anchored to space-time coordinates, is precisely the originality that allows Shalamov to claim his own special place in literature: a border area between life and death, where the subject is in some ways absent, because the narrator's "ego" has undergone amputation, like the hand of his protagonist.

The new literary space is constructed as a "time regained"—the resurrection of the avant-garde and of literary experiments of the early 20th century. Similarly, along with some other authors of the Soviet 1960s, Shalamov claims the legacy of the Silver Age.[43]

> I am a direct heir of Russian modernism—Bely and Remizov. I learned not from Tolstoy, but from Bely, and in my stories there are traces of this

40 Vladimir Narbut, "Sovest'" [Conscience], in idem, *Izbrannye stikhi* (Paris: 1983), 164–165.

41 On doubles, see Luba Jurgenson, "Dvoinichestvo v rasskazakh Shalamova," in *Semiotika straha*, ed. Norah Buhks and Francis Conte (Paris: 2005), 329–336.

42 Shalamov, "Tropa" [The Path], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, 105.

43 See Viacheslav Ivanov, "Poeziia Shalamova" [Shalamov's Poetry], in *Varlam Shalamov v kontekste mirovoi literatury i sovetskoi istorii*, 31–41.

> study. It was easy for me to speak with Pasternak, Ehrenburg, Nadezhda Mandelstam, because they understood well what that was about. However, with a person like Solzhenitsyn, I see that he simply does not understand what is at stake.
>
> Я – прямой наследник русского модернизма – Белого и Ремизова. Я учился не у Толстого, а у Белого, и в любом моем рассказе есть следы этой учебы. С Пастернаком, Эренбургом, с Мандельштам мне было легко говорить потому, что они хорошо понимали, в чем тут дело. А с таким лицом, как Солженицын, я вижу, что он просто не понимает, о чем идет речь.[44]

Moreover, to Shalamov, the Soviet literary process itself appears like a mutilated body: much of its richness had been amputated, with the practice of amputation continuing in the post-Stalin era. Thus, in his November 1962 letter to Solzhenitsyn, Shalamov writes about his book of poems, *Ognivo* (Flint): "It took to me six years of effort to publish one collection of poem-cripples, verse-invalids, where each poem was cut." Later, in his letter to the critic Oleg Mikhailov he complains about *Road and Fate*: "Here are collected *poem-cripples*, *verse-invalids* (as in the previous collections)."[45]

5 Conclusions

With Shalamov's break from the tradition of the novel and the creation of "new prose," a literary construction built on personal suffering and cemented by blood, we can draw a paradoxical line from the avant-garde to Kolyma (paradoxical, because the avant-garde saw itself as the end-point in the process, with no possibility of continuation; modernism denied the transmission of heritage). On this path, Shalamov was less lonely than it may seem. He joined the stream of the 1960s, seeking to restore time, to prolong the life of literary movements destroyed by Stalinism. In this sense, writers and poets

44 Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, 322.

45 "Я … с трудом опубликовал за шесть лет один сборник стихов-калек, стихов-инвалидов, где каждое стихотворение урезано, изуродовано." Shalamov, "Perepiska s A. I. Solzhenitsynym" [Correspondence with Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 6, 288–89. "Здесь собраны стихи-калеки, стихи-инвалиды (как и в прошлых сборниках)," Shalamov, Letter from February 2, 1968, "Perepiska s O. N. Mikhailovym" [Correspondence with Oleg Mikhailov], ibid., 530.

of the 1960s proved to be phantom hands, completing the text of Russian modernism. Shalamov's place as an author—a non-existent place—was one in which the aesthetic postulates of the avant-garde—in particular the futurist metaphor of the disjointed body, depicting the device—came into contact with the reality of the Gulag.

Turning back time to make it work in reverse, making the concentration camp experience act on the past to create author's own space within literary history: this anachronistic approach is part of the construction of a great literary and testimonial work. Both Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn do this, each in his own way. Thus, Solzhenitsyn also started a time machine. His goal was not to recover the modernist aesthetic, but to regain the "true" Russian language, to purge it of "Sovietisms," to return to a state fixed by Dal'[46]—to the Golden Age, the other 60s, those of the 19th century. By using archaisms as neologisms, trying to restore some obsolete morphemes, and reviving unusual combinations, Solzhenitsyn created his own language utopia, as embodied in the *Russian Dictionary of Language Expansion*. Solzhenitsyn feels "cramped" in the current Russian language. He is also looking for a place for himself, and he finds it by gaining a new living space: a language space that is not in a condensed language field, as in the case of Shalamov, but in language continuity, a language that has not undergone a revolution, as he explains in his preface to the *Dictionary*:

> The best way to enrich a language is to restore previously accumulated, and then lost, wealth. … So the French in the beginning of the 20th century (Charles Nodier and others)[47] chose the right method: to restore the old French words, already lost in the XVIII century. … Here words are selected that do not in any way deserve premature death, still quite flexible, concealing a rich movement—and yet completely abandoned, existing close to the boundary of our worn-out narrow use—the area of desired and feasible language expansion.
>
> Лучший способ обогащения языка – это восстановление прежде накопленных, а потом утерянных богатств… Так и французы в начале XIX века (Ш. Нодье и др.) пришли к этому верному способу: восстанавливать старофранцузские слова, уже утерянные в XVIII веке. …

46 Vladimir Dal', *Tolkovyi slovar' zhivogo velikorusskogo jazyka* [Explanatory Dictionary of the Living Russian Language] (Moscow-St-Petersburg: 1863).

47 In other words, during the era of Restoration, the historical model of the post-Soviet reconstruction for Solzhenitsyn.

> Тут подобраны слова, никак не заслуживающие преждевременной смерти, еще вполне гибкие, таящие в себе богатое движение – а между тем целиком заброшенные, существующие близко рядом с границей нашего изношенного узкого употребления – область желанного и осуществимого языкового расширения.[48]

The territories of utopia, or rather of "uchronia" (not-time) are not the same in the works of Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov, just as their places of imprisonment are not the same. Language further separates them, as evidenced in Shalamov's words from the unsent letter to Solzhenitsyn: "Your excessive enthusiasm for Dal's dictionary was simply a joke, for Dal' is Dal', and not *Bol'* [pain]."[49]

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48 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Russkii slovar' iazykovogo rasshireniia* [Russian Dictionary of Language Expansion] (Moscow: 2000), 3–4.

49 "Ваше чрезмерное увлечение словарем Даля принял просто за шутку, ибо Даль – это Даль, а не боль." Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, 366.

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CHAPTER 5

Tactility and Memory in Shalamov

Fabian Heffermehl

1 The Artwork and Its Memory

This contribution offers an interpretation of Shalamov's self-proclaimed affiliation to modernism:

> I am a direct heir of the Russian modernism, Belyi and Remizov. I did study not under Tolstoy, but under Belyi, and in each of my tales there are traces of this study.
>
> Я – прямой наследник русского модернизма – Белого и Ремизова. Я учился не у Толстого, а у Белого, и в любом моем рассказе есть следы этой учебы.[1]

Shalamov's identification with Belyi and modernism indicates the profound importance of painting techniques for his writing strategies. In his 1910 essay "The Art of the Future" (Budushchee iskusstvo), Andrei Belyi saw the goal of art as lying in the act of creation rather than the creative result:

> Let us transfer the question of the aim of art from studying the products of creativity to the very processes of creativity. The products of creativity are ashes and magmas, the processes of creativity are fleeting lava.
>
> Переносим мы вопрос о цели искусства от рассмотрения продуктов творчества к самым процессам творчества; продукты творчества – пепел и магма; процессы творчества – текучая лава.[2]

1 Varlam Shalamov, "Zapisnye knizhki 1971 g." [Notebooks from 1971], in idem, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh* [Collective Works in Six Volumes] (Moscow: 2013), vol. 5, 322. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

2 Andrei Belyi, "Budushchee iskusstvo" [The Future Art], in idem, *Simvolizm kak miroponimanie* [Symbolism as a Worldview] (Moscow: 1994), 144.

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The main problem of modernism—the *specificity*[3] of a work of art, or its self-referentiality, i.e. its emancipation from representation—is here formulated as a *performative* and *retrospective* concept: *performative*, because art is perceived as an act, not a result; *retrospective*, because the goal lies in the genesis, in the process of creation. In analyzing Shalamov, I see performativity and retrospectivity as problems of (a) *tactility* and (b) *memory*. (a) The process of artistic creation implies tactile interaction between the artist or writer's body, his/her hand, and the surface on which something is written or painted. Here Belyi uses the geological metaphor "fleeting lava," which like a work of art refers to the world in its process of formation. Because of the extreme temperatures involved, lava has connotations of something tactile, rather than visual—(skin, rather than the eye). The tactility of images and texts is dominant over their optical qualities or readability. (b) However, the work of art, like layers in geological structures, must preserve the material memory of itself, of its creation in "fleeting lava." In this context, "medium specificity" (see footnote 3) means that the form remembers its origin in formlessness.

This interpretation of Belyi's statement means that a psychological faculty is attributed to a non-living substance. While tactility—having qualities like hard or soft, cold or warm—is found in all material objects, only intelligent, living beings may possess memory. Thus, the modernistic principle of material specificity is transferred into anthropomorphism. It is as if we are confronted with an archaic idol, an "animated image,"[4] acting from the inside of its materials. In this way, the work of art oscillates between the tautology of a thing, displaying itself as solely a thing (specificity / modernism),[5] and the magic of anthropomorphism (archaism). In turn, this oscillation indicates a performative force in images and letters.

Franziska Thun-Hohenstein, Susanne Frank and Liubov' Jurgenson have differently emphasized the performative character of Shalamov's writings:

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3 = The artwork's state of being "constituted by the characteristic qualities of the raw material." "Medium specificity," University of Chicago, accessed May 3, 2017, http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/specificity.htm.

4 Moshe Barasch, *Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea* (New York: 1995), 36ff.

5 This anthropomorphism shows a fundamental difference between Russian symbolism and American minimalism. For artists such as Frank Stella and Donald Judd *specificity* was understood in a "purely tautological" sense. The "specific" artwork excludes its origin in time and relations to anything outside itself. See Georges Didi-Huberman, *Was wir sehen blickt uns an* [What we See Gazes Back] (*Munich*: 1999), 40ff. Donald Judd, "Specific Objects" (1965), accessed August 7, 2018, http://atc.berkeley.edu/201/readings/judd-so.pdf.

the text is "not only speaking, but also acting."[6] In intersections between performativity, tactility and memory this article will further elaborate on Shalamov's "Plutonian authorship." In 1965 Shalamov writes his manifesto "O proze" (On Prose), which explicitly denies the classic optic paradigm of the *seeing* artist:

> The author is *not an observer*, *not a spectator*, but a participant in the drama of life … Pluto ascending from Hades, and not Orpheus descending into Hades.[7]
>
> Писатель – не наблюдатель, не зритель, а участник драмы жизни, участник и не в писательском обличье, не в писательской роли. Плутон, поднявшийся из ада, а не Орфей, спускавшийся в ад.[8]

Tactility follows from the denial of optical distance. If we interpret Shalamov's definition of the author as a symptom of modernism, rather than as an expression of the author's conscious intention, these words imply that a Cartesian separation between the observing self and the observed world is impossible. The writer is part of the literary space s/he creates. A written, suffering object is internalized in a writing subject. There is no (optical) distance between the eye and the writing, between the subject and the object of writing—nor between the subject and the object of terror.

With his Plutonian eradication of distance, Shalamov returns to the act of creation. The work of art is art-*work* in the sense of a constant process of re-working. The lava, like a picture painted with edible oil, does not dry. The wound does not heal. However, Shalamov's emphasis on continuing participation—of the lava in the stone, the colors in the image, or the wound

6 "Поэтому текст этот является перформативным, он не только говорение, но и действие." Liubov' Jurgenson, "'Kolymskie rasskazy' v svete sovremennykh diskussii ob esteticheskikh aspektakh svidetel'skikh dokumentov," in *Varlam Shalamov v kontekste mirovoi literatury i sovetskoi istorii* [Varlam Shalamov in Context of World Literature and Soviet History], ed. Sergei Solov'ev (Moscow: 2013), 102. See Franziska Thun-Hohenstein, "Rabota Varlama Shalamova nad poetikoi operativnosti" [Varlam Shalamov's Work on Poetics of Operativity I], in *Varlam Shalamov v kontekste mirovoi literatury i sovetskoi istorii* [Varlam Shalamov in Context of World Literature and Soviet History], ed. Sergei Solov'ev (Moscow: 2013), 111–119; Susanne Frank, "Varlam Šalamovs Arbeit an einer Poetik der Operativität I" [Varlam Shalamov's Work on Poetics of Operativity I], in *Evidenz und Zeugenschaft* [Evidence and Witnessing)], ed. Susanne Frank, *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach* 69 (*Munich:* 2012).

7 Italics are added.

8 Shalamov, "O proze" [On Prose], in *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, 151.

in the body—may call into question the whole culture of memory and testimony that emerged on background of the cataclysmic experiences of the 20th century.

Given the profound differences in how history is perceived in Russia and in Western Europe, we may well ask if any translation of the German term *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* ("coping with the past") into Russian is possible. Although frequently used in German political discourse, the term seems to be downplayed in research on memory. In a comprehensive volume on memory theories, issued by J.B. Metzler Publishers, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is not introduced as a term, but merely as a peripheral word, mentioned only once, without any definition.[9] Aleida Assmann disputes the usefulness of the term in context of memory and the Holocaust, preferring *Vergangenheitsbewahrung*—"preserving the past"—instead.[10] In my view, Shalamov's writing strategies reveal important problems connected with *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, problems that apply in both the Western European and the Russian contexts. In a still-repressive state, the point of *Bewältigung* could be to mark what Adorno criticized as a "Schlußstrich"[11]—an end-point—in the formation of a collective memory. But that is contrary to the political intention of the concept: to support reconciliation between past and present, between truth and memory, and in the end provide a "path to a new common future."[12] I hold that Shalamov's writing rejects the possibility of such reconciliation.

His Plutonian authorship indicates disruption and displacement, which in the end signals a profound contradiction: The specificity of writing—the tactile interaction between hand and paper—appears in conjunction with the pain, the tactile *trauma* (from Greek: *wound*), which takes away the body's ability to write: "A note? Could I, would I, be able to write a note with these fingers? I can write only with the chopper, the axe or the shovel."[13] The contradiction between writing and inability to write reflects the deeper impossibility

9 *Gedächtnis und Erinnerung. Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch* [Memory and Recollection, an Interdisciplinary Handbook] ed. Christian Gudehus et al. (Stuttgart/Weimar: 2010), 313.

10 Aleida Assmann, *Das neue Unbehagen an der Erinnerungskultur: eine Intervention* [Memory Culture, an Intervention] (*Munich*: 2016), 117.

11 Theodor Adorno, "Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit?" [What Means Vergangenheitsbewältigung?], accessed March 14, 2018, http://aawe.blogsport.de/images/Theodor20W20Adorno2020Was20heisst.pdf.

12 Assmann, *Das neue Unbehagen*, 117.

13 "Записку? Разве этими пальцами я напишу, могу написать какую-нибудь записку? Я могу писать только кайлом, топором, лопатой." Shalamov, "Asia" [Asia], in *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 4, 512–513.

of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, further stressed by Shalamov's border crossings between the fictional, the factual and the tactile. With his difference from the mainstream Western post-Holocaust discourse Shalamov is *sui generis*. My expected conclusion may disappoint those who in Shalamov's testimony seek support against re-Stalinization in Russia.[14] A Russian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is opposed not only by politics, but also by literary practice—by the fictional tactility and utopian performativity—which produce and preserve memory. The result is terrifying: Shalamov's Plutonian authorship not only provides testimony, counteracting the late Soviet politics of forgetting: it also *reproduces* the terror from the past. How does a tactile technique of disruption and displacement define the place of the Plutonian authorship in the Russian (crisis of) collective memory?

2 Tactile Memory Techniques: Acheiropoiesis and Autopoiesis

Leonardo da Vinci noted how images place their content at disposal of the eyes—and with the same resources that perception uses to register physical things.[15] With its optic-mimetic qualities, a painting constitutes the perfect memory medium, transferring (and manipulating) visual impressions from past to present. However, unlike the sense of sight, tactility has no external, or "ex-bodied," memory. The feeling of a touch can be preserved only by the internal memory of the brain. The tangible cannot be translated into a medium or in any direct way be transmitted further to the community. The tactile sense belongs exclusively to the individual memory: it has no place in the collective.[16]

Shalamov's literary project may be understood as strategies to overcome this phenomenological obstacle. Tactility turns into a memory technique—a technique for *memory dissemination*—by which the convict's multi-sensual experience of Kolyma becomes reconstructed in a meta-Gesamtkunstwerk.

14 See for instance Irina Scherbakowa, "Zerrissene Fäden der Erinnerung" [Disrupted Threads of Memory], in Wilfried Schoeller, *Leben oder Schreiben* [Living or Writing] (Berlin: 2013).

15 See Gottfried Boehm, *Studien zur Perspektivität* [Studies in Perspectivity] (Heidelberg: 1969), 35.

16 Therefore, I feel that Aleksandr Etkind fails in his attempt to transfer the tactile categories of "hard" and "soft" into cultural memory, whereby he links "hard" with sculpture, while "soft" designates the nature of texts. See Aleksandr Etkind, *Krivoe gore. Pamiat' o nepogrebennykh* [Warped Mourning. Memory of the Unburied] (Moscow: 2016), 221ff.

Here I distinguish between two tactile approaches to memory: a) *acheiropoiesis* or *nerukotvornost'*, i.e. *being not created by hand*, and b), *autopoiesis*, i.e. *self-creation*. We can trace these two approaches in two consecutive tales by Shalamov: "Tropa" (The Path) and "Grafit" (Graphite). The difference between acheiropoiesis and autopoiesis amounts to the difference between *ex-* and *em*bodiment: between a physical body, which has once and once only, "left its trace" and produced its external "double" in an imprint; and the continuous performativity of a fictional body acting in the internal physical matter of a painting.

Tactility can be traced as a literary phenomenon in medieval narratives of the acheiropoietic icon, with the idea that the first icon came into being as a trace of suffering, in the physical touch between a veil and the blood and sweat of Christ's face. Such tactility is further repeated in everyday Russian Orthodox practices of rituals and routines such as kissing the icon and touching it with the forehead. In this way, the nexus between image and body forms the genesis of the icon's memory techniques, whose main object of collective preservation is the face of God.[17]

Plato defined memory as impressions inscribed or imprinted in a block of wax situated in the soul.[18] In "Tropa" there are *acheiropoietic* traces, not created, but *caused*, by the body's movement in the landscape. Poems are created in the convict's footprints, following traces of pre-human, pre-modern beings, the "Egyptian [*sic*] cuneiform inscription of hens."[19] Knut Hamsun opened his epic novel *Markens grøde* (*Growth of the Soil*) with the words: "The long, long road over the moors and up into the forest—who trod it into being first of all? Man, a human being, the first that came here. There was no path before he came."[20] Shalamov lets the path define a relationship between man and nature based in the technical origin of the concept *culture*: to cultivate land.[21]

17 See Charles Barber, *Figure and Likeness. On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm* (Princeton, NJ: 2002), 24ff. Fabian Heffermehl, "Nerukotvornost' i problema mnemotekhniki GULAGa" [Acheiropoiesis and the Issue of GULAG Mnemonics], *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach* 76 (2015), 215–245. (English version: http://www.museumofrussianicons.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Apr_2016_Heffermehl_Fabian_The_Icon_and_the_Hand_Journal_article.pdf).

18 Plato, *Thaetetus*, 191d, accessed August 17, 2019, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu.

19 Shalamov, "Tropa" [The Path], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, 106.

20 Knut Hamsun, *Growth of the Soil*, accessed August 7, 2018, http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/10984/pg10984.html. Shalamov refers to Hamsun's *Growth of the Soil* in his "Pamiat'," *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 4, 441.

21 See *Bild—Schrift—Zahl* [The Path], ed. Sybille Krämer and Horst Bredekamp (Munich: 2009), 11ff.

However, the "memory temple" of the path is violated in a manner described in Plato's *Thaetetus*,[22] by the intervention of a stranger's feet in the narrator's footprint: "The alien trace was left in spring, and during the whole summer I did not write any line on this path."[23]

Unlike *acheiropoiesis*, which denotes finished external actions (the imprint of an archetype into external matter), *autopoiesis* refers to the intrinsic agency of the materials. A depiction of the crucifixion by Fra Beato Angelico shows the blood of Christ flowing from the nails of the cross. This blood is not depicted in the way liquid usually would run on three-dimensional objects. It does not follow the form of the arm, and does therefore not obey imaginary physical laws, which belong exclusively to the pictorial space. Instead it flows vertically down the surface of the canvas, and gives therefore the impression of being three-dimensional, not painted, blood, as noted by Horst Bredekamp:

> The pictorial surface has crossed its own boundaries in order to act further in another gestalt as the skin of Christ. Here is not the face of Christ imprinted in Veronica's veil, but rather the opposite: the bearer and color of the image are turned into the body of Christ.
>
> Der Bildtafel selbst ist über sich hinausgetreten, um als Haut Christi in anderer Gestalt fortzuwirken. Hier druckt sich nicht das Gesicht Christi in das Tuch der Veronika, sondern umgekehrt werden der Träger und die Farbe des Gemäldes von innen her zum Körper Christi.[24]

The principle of *autopoiesis* penetrates Shalamov's literary oeuvre: from his self-identification with Pluto, writing and acting from within Hades, to statements of performativity, analogous to that of Fra Angelico: "That which has been suffered with one's own blood comes out on paper as a document of the soul."[25] The document, the literary work, with its paper, handwriting and material traces of pen or pencil, presents a physiological parallel phenomenon

22 Plato, *Thaetetus*, 193c.

23 "Чужой след был оставлен весной, и за все лето я не написал на этой тропе ни строчки." Shalamov, "Tropa," *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, 106.

24 Horst Bredekamp, *Theorie des Bildakts* [Theory of the Image Act] (Berlin: 2013), 255.

25 Translation in Josephina Lundblad Janjić, *Writer or Witness: Problems of Varlam Shalamov's Late Prose and Dramaturgy* (dissertation, Berkeley, CA: 2017), 24. "Выстраданное собственной кровью входит на бумагу как документ души." Shalamov, "O proze," 151.

to what in modern art is called "ready-made"—an entity taken untransformed from the "real" into the medium. Shalamov begins his "Grafit" by expressing an extreme sensitivity to the material aspects of writing:

> Which ink is used to sign death sentences—chemical ink, the India ink used in passports, the ink of fountain-pens, alizarin [mixed with blood]? No death sentence has ever been signed simply in pencil. In the taiga we had no use for ink. Any ink will dissolve in rain, tears, and blood.[26]

> Чем подписывают смертные приговоры: химическими чернилами или паспортной тушью, чернилами шариковых ручек или ализарином, разбавленным чистой кровью? Можно ручаться, что ни одного смертного приговора не подписано простым карандашом. В тайге нам не нужны чернила. Дождь, слезы, кровь растворят любые чернила, любой химический карандаш.[27]

In the world of bureaucratic administration, ink remains, whereas pencil traces may be erased. However, outside civilization, without access to usual writing instruments, the convict returns to an ecological view of writing.[28] The eternal and the ephemeral—the Kolymean landscape and the evanescence of the convict—are embodied in the graphite and the chemical pencil: "Graphite is nature. It participates in the spinning of the planet and resists time better than stone."[29]

Belyi's idea of the superiority of the creative process is intensified in form of a text, which memorizes not only its own material genesis, but also the context in which it came into being: the geological formation of writing materials in the landscape of Kolyma:

> Graphite is carbon that has been subjected to enormous pressure for millions of years and that might have become coal or diamonds. Instead, however, it has been transformed into something more precious than

26 Shalamov, "Graphite," in idem, *Kolyma tales*, trans. John Glad (London: 1994), Kindle, 6428–6434.

27 Shalamov, "Grafit," *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, 106–107.

28 According to Shalamov, Pasternak always wrote his letters with chemical ink, and his manuscripts with pencil. Shalamov, "Pasternak," *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 4, 590.

29 Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales*, 6448–6460. "Графит – это природа, графит участвует в круговороте земном, подчас сопротивляясь времени лучше, чем камень." Shalamov, "Grafit," 108.

> diamond; it has become a pencil that can record all that it has [known and] seen.[30]

> Но графит, углерод, сжатый под высочайшим давлением в течение миллионов лет и превращенный если не в каменный уголь, то в бриллиант или в то, что дороже бриллианта, в карандаш, в графит, который может записывать все, что знал и видел.[31]

> Paper is one of the faces [masks], one of the transformations of a tree into diamond and graphite. Graphite is eternity, the highest standard of hardness, which has become the highest standard of softness. A trace left in the taiga by a graphite pencil is eternal.[32]

> Бумага – одна из личин, одно из превращений дерева в алмаз и графит. Графит – это вечность. Высшая твердость, перешедшая в высшую мягкость. Вечен след, оставленный в тайге графитным карандашом.[33]

In the taiga, as on paper, traces are written by the "cartographers"—demiurgic figures, communicating with heaven.[34] Writing, word creation, is world creation. Through geology—the science of time and persistence—Shalamov establishes unity between his 17-year sentence, his writing and the cosmos. In the tactile interaction between paper, hand and graphite pencil Shalamov re-creates Kolyma out of his memory.

This strategy of memory testifies to tactility as the proto-sense of perception. In "Tridtsat' vos'moi" (Thirty-eighth) Shalamov refers to what he calls his "muscular memory."[35] In his first letter to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Shalamov compares editors with "woodcutters".[36] Reading and writing are conceived as tactile techniques of memory and forgetting. The employment of tactility shows the proximity of Shalamov's *Kolyma Stories* to modernistic practices of

30 Translation is modified. Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales*, 6437–6448.
31 Shalamov, "Grafit," 108.
32 Translation is modified. Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales*, 6448–6460.
33 Shalamov, "Grafit," 108.
34 Ibid., 107. See Liubov' Jurgenson, "Zemlemer u Kafki i topograf u Shalamova: nekotorye paralleli" [The Earth-Measurer of Kafka and Shalamov's Topographer: Some Parallels], accessed February 8, 2018, https://shalamov.ru/research/278/.
35 Shalamov, "Tridcat' vos'moj" [Thirty Eighth], in *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 4, 459.
36 Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 6, 291.

painting: "Art is life, not a reflection of life." "Painting is physical workmanship."[37] Authentic testimony requires first a retrospective return to the *process*, to Belyi's "fleeting lava," by which the work of art creates itself. Second, authentic testimony rejects traditional concepts of "art" and "literature," terms entailing certain implicit value judgments and the "burden" of a cultural heritage of optical visibility and faciality. The emphasis turns to the material phenomena, to "images" or "texts," whereby Kolyma is deconstructed as a space not devoid of history and memory, but as the inversion or perversion of these.

3 Amputation and Anarchism

Again and again, Shalamov's tactile techniques invoke his suffering from the past. Writing and memorizing appear as masochistic acts. His body is recreated within Kolyma—this endless space, which, because it has no borders to cross, constitutes a closed space, a prison. Writing and recollection become torture techniques, reflecting his deepest conviction of implementing the punishment of the underground divinity—of Pluto—on himself.

Recurrent participation in past pain is reflected in the short story "Zhuk" (The Beetle). On the shores of Moscow River, a beetle attacks his fictional I. As a man accustomed to being beaten regularly, he does not try to escape, but accepts fate. "For him, the objectivity of an ideal spectator is less important than the genuine albeit useless knowledge of pain."[38] In the strategically final sentence, the focus shifts from the trauma caused by the beetle to the problem of memory:

> I did not follow up the wound. I understood that in the human body no processes may be fastened. I knew from literature, that there must be some period, in the course of which the body by itself heals its wounds. After five days my wound stopped itching.
>
> But memory? Memory? How to deal with memory?

> Я не следил за раной. Я понимал, что в человеческом теле никаких процессов ускорить нельзя. Я знал по литературе, что должен прой-

37 "Искусство – это жизнь, но не отражение жизни." "Живопись – это физическая работа." Varlam Shalamov, "Zapisnye knizhki 1954–1979 gg." [Note Books 1954–1979], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, 271, 326.

38 Leona Toker, *Return from the Archipelago* (Bloomington, IN: 2000), 142.

ти какой-то срок, в течение которого тело само залечит свои раны. Через пять дней рана моя перестала чесаться.

Но память? Память? Что делать с памятью?[39]

The small black figure of the insect amounts to memory as the author's main unresolved problem. Even if the physical wound heals, the memory of it remains in the body, still tactile, still traumatic.

This understanding of memory as tactile trauma is symbolically conveyed by Shalamov's translation of acheiropoietic memory techniques from medieval Russian culture into the Siberian landscape: "The wounded larch is like a prophetic icon – like the Chukotsk Mother of God or the Virgin Mary of Kolyma who awaits and foretells a miracle."[40] The larch shows its annual lines—which formally connect cultural memory with the curvature of the tactile fingerprint—through amputation. In connection with Shalamov's poem "Pen'" (The Stump), Susanne Frank asserts that the section of wood may visualize his biography, brutally cut off.[41] This connection between memory and amputation has precedents both in Shalamov's autobiography and in the Gulag bureaucracy. Shalamov claims to have lost a finger in a fight during his childhood.[42] Indigenous people of Siberia have given witness about a practice,[43] mentioned by Shalamov (first in a letter to Boris Pasternak dated January 8, 1956, later developed in his tales "Akademik," "Grafit," "Perchatka" and "Galina Pavlovna Zybalova"), whereby the hands of dead fugitives are chopped, so that the fingerprints can be registered in the camp archives.[44] As underlined by Luba Jurgenson, to bear witness about the past means to relinquish the writing hand.[45] By this materialization of *acheiropoiesis—not being made by hand*—we approach a typical problem of iconoclasm. In smashing

39 Shalamov, "Zhuk" [The Beetle], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 7, 104.

40 Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales*, 6448–6460. "Раненое тело лиственницы подобно явленной иконе – какой-нибудь Богородицы Чукотской, Девы Марии Колымской, ожидающей чуда, являющей чуда." Shalamov, "Grafit," 108.

41 Susanne Frank, "Literatur als Medium des Körpergedächtnisses," [Literature as Body Memory] in *Schalamow, Lektüren* [Shalamov. Readings], ed. Dirk, Naguschewski and Matthias Schwartz (Berlin: 2018), 131–132.

42 Shalamov, *Chetvertaia Vologda* [The Fourth Vologda], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 4, 22.

43 Piers Vitebsky, *Reindeer People. Living with Animals and Spirits in Siberia* (London: 2005), 223.

44 See Heffermehl, "Problema nerukotvornosti i mnemotekhniki Gulaga," 234–235.

45 Luba Jurgenson, "Spur, Dokument, Prothese" [Trace, Document, Prosthesis], in *Das Lager Schreiben* [Writing the Camp], *Osteuropa*, no. 6 (2007).

an image or thing, the iconoclast destroys it—but underlying this act is the assumption that the object possesses a magical form of life. The act of destruction animates the object. The human being is annihilated and substituted by things, while things are anthropomorphized: "There is no tale, it is the thing that tells."[46]

According to Frank, Shalamov, through his emphasis on literature as a document/thing, "develops a relation between the prisoner and his working instrument, revealing the real mechanism of the annihilation of the human being."[47] True testimony is not so much provided by the survivors, who in accordance with Primo Levi's famous resignation have not "*touched* the bottom."[48] True testimony has its basis in material, tactile, touchable things, fragments and relics. Put differently, memory, power and acting ability reside in extracts or readymades "amputated" directly from the events—from "the process" or "fleeting lava"—and therefore testifying to those. By amputation the "process" or "narrative" never approaches any conclusion, but, as if in accordance with Belyi's claim about the work of art, remains in a state of processuality continuing *ad infinito*.

This memory-structure of tactile, traumatic and processual components shows that Shalamov is challenging not only the late Soviet politics of forgetting: he is also challenging *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in the literal sense of the word. First, the work of art does not represent any unity, or perfection, but an amputated fragment. Memory is preserved in an open wound. Solution or reconciliation—closing the wound—would in this sense mean oblivion. Second, if memory and speaking/acting ability reside in non-human entities, in touchable things, that means a rejection of political memory, defined by Assmann as "perspectival" selective organization of the past.[49] Shalamov's "methodology" resists perspective, both in the transposed meaning of an overarching, holistic systematization, and directly as the pictorial organization of sight. Instead, his tactile memory is spread out over multiple singularities: some 145 tales, with thousands of names and fragments. The Gulag is presented as if in deaf-

46 "Никакого рассказа нет. Рассказывает вещь." Shalamov, "Zolotaia medal'" [The Golden Medal], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, 222.

47 Susanne Frank, "Šalamovs Arbeit an einer Poetik der Operativität I," 31.

48 Italics added. Quoted in Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: 2002), 54.

49 Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit* [The Long Shadow of the Past] (Munich: 2018), 36.

blindness, when surroundings are perceived by their discontinuous materiality.[50]

It is this fragmented discrete touching which provides Shalamov's texts with authenticity. However, without a continuous perspective there is no cumulative whole, no community of singular entities, which could have been the basic condition for a meaningful *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. His writing is self-centered in its autonomy, in its concentration on the ability/non-ability to write. This is a writing which constantly problematizes its physical origin, mystifying itself through contradictions, antinomies and discontinuity—in the end, becoming Shalamov's self-projection: "Indeed I consist of splinters, into which I was smashed by the Kolymian Camp Republic."[51]

Varlam Shalamov's turn from a holistic perspective to amputated fragments of being may be illustrated by his conflict-ridden, sometimes characterized as "hate-ridden,"[52] relationship with his father, the Orthodox priest Tikhon Shalamov. Varlam's autobiography *Chetvertaia Vologda* (The Fourth Vologda) outlines two opposing tendencies in Tikhon: secular enlightenment, and archaic esotericism. On one hand, Tikhon is a public figure, a political activist, teetotaler, liberal and courageous defender of religious pluralism;[53] he speaks fluent English, has travelled on two continents, loves science, literature (Tolstoi) and classical painting (Rembrandt, Repin). Tikhon's Orthodoxy seems to play a minor role in the formation of Varlam. What Varlam opposes in Tikhon is primarily his "European" enlightenment, career ambitions and societal adaptability. He despises his father's adherence to "pablisity" ("publicity"),[54] which he sees as diametrically opposed to his own destiny: "You believe in success, in career. I am not going to do any career. I will die nameless somewhere in Eastern Siberia … You wanted me to be a public activist, I will only be a denier."[55]

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50 Irina Sandomirskaia shows by example of the deaf and blind writer Ol'ga Skorokhodova how tactile perception materializes the Cartesian doubt in being. See Irina Sandomirskaia, *Blokada v slove* [Blockade in the Word] (Moscow: 2013), 17ff.

51 "Я же состою из осколков, на которые раздробила меня Колымская лагерная республика." Oral statement quoted in Fedot Suchkov, "Ego pokazaniia" [His Statements], in *Shalamovskii sbornik* [Shalamov Collection], ed. Valerii Esipov, vol. 1 (Vologda: 1994), 154.

52 See Shalamov, *Chetvertaia Vologda*, 45–46.

53 Shalamov describes how his father publicly defended Jews against pogroms. Ibid., 50, 115.

54 Ibid., 54, 55, 87.

55 "Ты веришь в успех, в карьеру – я карьеру делать не буду – безымянным умру где-нибудь в Восточной Сибири. … Ты хотел, чтобы я сделался общественным деятелем, я буду только опровергателем." Ibid., 142.

On the other hand, under his cloak of religiosity Tikhon appears with features of submerged pre-Christian paganism and shamanism. This hidden esoteric aspect became evident at the end of his life, when he commits a "ritual," "sacrificial" act: the destruction of his own cross. "Father cleaved his cross in front of Mother's eyes like a pagan and shaman, and inheritor of shamans, who destroy their god with the own hands, like an Eskimo, a Zyrian, a Permyak."[56] In contrast to "pablisity," Varlam sees the source for this "shamanism" in what unites him with his father: the family name *Shalamov*, acoustically rooted in the word *shaman*,[57] and their common genetic origin in the landscape of the "first Vologda":

> Naturally, my father—shaman and son of a shaman—returned after twenty years' foreign service as a European educated man, not to the first Vologda, in which he had his origin; not to the second, the historical, in the name of which he was taught to speak; but to the third Vologda: Vologda of the freedom movement.
>
> Естественно, что отец – шаман и сын шамана – вернулся после двенадцати лет заграничной службы европейски образованным человеком – вернулся не к первой Вологде – оттуда он вышел родом, не ко второй – исторической, от имени которой он уже научен был говорить, а к третьей Вологде – Вологде освободительного движения.[58]

Varlam points out the difference between the return of his father from Alaska in 1905 and his own return some 48 years later from Kolyma. Tikhon returned not to the provincial Vologda of paganism, which nevertheless still formed his identity, not to the "historical" center of Orthodoxy, but to a secularized cosmopolitan project for the new society. *Ex negativo* follows Varlam's self-identification with "those who deny," after having experienced the perversion of the utopias and social projects from the 1910s and 1920s on their own bodies; and his return to something in his individuality, perhaps even in the past of his ancestors, which may be more fundamental than any collective project: an esoteric, magic anarchism.

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56 "Свой крест отец разрубил ощупью на глазах матери, язычник и шаман, и наследник шаманов, уничтожающих Бога собственными руками, как эскимос, зырянин, пермяк…" Ibid., 146.

57 Ibid., 48.

58 Ibid., 17.

4 Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn

In the sense of Varlam Shalamov being a "denier," his tales are characterized as "non-literature without moral,"[59] in contrast to Primo Levi and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. In Levi's autobiography *Se questo è un uomo* (If this is a Man),[60] the Hungarian Sómogyi dies in Auschwitz on January 25, 1945—two days before liberation. During the last hours of his life, Sómogyi offers his bread to fellow convicts. This act of self-sacrifice and sharing of the bread marks the beginning of friendship between Auschwitz survivors and their return to humanity.

A similar act of solidarity is described in the final pages of Solzhenitsyn's "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich." The convicts generously exchange food in form of biscuits with each other[61] (*biscuits*, not *bread*). Instead of a too obvious reference to the Last Supper—problematic both for the censorship, and for the sake of artistry—the classic components of an Orthodox, evangelical narrative are expressed through hidden intertextuality. Nutrition is upgraded to the spiritual level, where the connection between the Gulag and cultural history is established.

Through suffering, the convicts preserve their human dignity, or even purify it. The camp appears as offering a kind of catharsis, cleansing with a possible positive outcome. Ivan Denisovich Shukhov admits that the camp has had a positive moral effect on him:

> Since he'd been in the camps Shukhov had thought many a time of the food they used to eat in the village—whole frying pans full of potatoes, porridge by the caldron, and, in the days before the kolkhoz, great hefty chunks of meat … But he [realized in the camps that it should not be like that]…[62]

> В лагерях Шухов не раз вспоминал, как в деревне раньше ели: картошку – целыми сковородами, кашу – чугунками, а еще раньше,

59 Ulrich Schmid, "Nicht-Literatur ohne Moral" [Non-Literature Without Moral], in *Das Lager Schreiben* [Writing the Camp], *Osteuropa*, no. 6 (2007), 87–105.

60 Also known in English as *Survival in Auschwitz*.

61 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha" [One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich], in idem, *Rasskazy. Krokhotki* (Moscow: 2012), 125.

62 Solzhenitsyn, "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich," accessed March 14, 2018, http://www.davar.net/EXTRACTS/FICTION/ONE-DAY.HTM. Translation modified.

> по-без-колхозов, мясо – ломтями здоровыми … А не надо было так, понял Шухов в лагерях.[63]

A strikingly different image of bread is presented in Shalamov's tale "Sherri-Brendi" (Cherry Brandy). Here bread is addressed as a tactile thing, to be held in the crippling hands of the dying poet (assumed to be Osip Mandelstam). Here, the consequences for relations between the prisoners are diametrically opposite compared with Levi's bread or Solzhenitsyn's biscuits:

> With all his strength he kept pushing [the bread] into his mouth, sucking it, tearing it, gnawing… His neighbours stopped him:
>
> "Don't eat it all, leave something for later. Later…" And the poet understood. He opened his eyes wide, not letting the bloodstained bread slip from his dirty bluish fingers.
>
> "When later?" he said clearly and distinctly. And he closed his eyes.
>
> He died toward evening.[64]

> Изо всех сил он прижимал ко рту, запихивал в рот хлеб, сосал его, рвал и грыз… Его останавливали соседи.
>
> – Не ешь все, лучше потом съешь, потом…
>
> И поэт понял. Он широко раскрыл глаза, не выпуская окровавленного хлеба из грязных синцеватых пальцев.
>
> – Когда потом? – отчетливо и ясно выговорил он и закрыл глаза.
>
> К вечеру он умер.[65]

The difference between one among 3653 identical days in the life of Ivan Denisovich and the last day in the life of Shalamov's poet is made clear by an opposition between the symbolics and the tactility of the bread, in turn amounting to different functions: the bread as medium for conveying solidarity and the bread as object of existential contestation. In its tactile phenomenality the poet's bread does not provide any basis for meaningful *re*presentation of the Gulag in a historical context: any comparison between the Gulag and any other historical cruelty is impossible. From this impossibility of comparison follows ethically another impossibility of justification of the Gulag crimes; and aesthetically the grotesque further treatment of the bread.

63 Solzhenitsyn, "Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha," 39.

64 Shalamov, "Cherry Brandy," *Kolyma tales*, 1069–1077.

65 Shalamov, "Sherri-Brendi," *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, 105.

After the poet is dead, the fellow convicts instrumentalize his body in order to gain more bread for themselves: "For two days his inventing neighbours managed to continue getting his bread ration. The dead man would raise his hand like a puppet."[66] This narrative conveys Shalamov's "Plutonian" authorship, whereby the fellow sufferer turns into perpetrator. However, Shalamov unites executioner and victim in a perverse act of "creativity" or "invention," with the convicts taking part in the humiliation of the poet's body.

The perversion of creativity is shown by the degeneration of the hand—the most tactile part of the body. Earlier, this hand had written poems, but it is now degenerated and finally reduced to a theatrical toy. The hand does not serve as the instrument for writing, but as its material. The poet's body, awaiting its destiny in the pulsation between life and death, is depicted in a passive, indifferent manner. The movements of the body are reduced to a minimum: "In the moments when life poured into his body and his clouded, half-open eyes began to see, when his eyelids began to quiver and his fingers to move…"[67]

These subtle movements seem reminiscent of the time when the hand was writing poetry. Now writing is impossible, because every touch evokes pain. The focus oscillates between frozen fingertips, and the hand moved by others. However, this inability of the hand to write indicates an autopoietic performativity, indicating the body as an object with acting ability: "Light fell on the poet's feet, and he lay as if in a box."[68] This "box"—similar to a coffin—indicates that he has reached a point beyond life. As written by Wilfried Schoeller: "Life is a guest in his body";[69] or by Shalamov: "Life entered by herself, mistress in her own home … he had not lived for poetry; he had lived through poetry."[70] The creation of a puppet "by inventive neighbors" is an absurd repetition of the creation of words in the body of the poet. The terrifying outcome of this narrative is that one of the greatest Russian modernists is presented as a fetish, an eidolon or ghost, a thing, animated by poetry, not

66 Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales*, 1159–1168. "Изобретательным соседям его удавалось при раздаче хлеба двое суток получать хлеб на мертвеца; мертвец поднимал руку, как кукла-марионетка." Shalamov, "Sherri-Brendi," 105.

67 Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales*, 1113–1124. "В те минуты, когда жизнь возвращалась в его тело и его полуоткрытые мутные глаза вдруг начали видеть, веки вздрагивать и пальцы шевелиться…" Shalamov, "Sherri-Brendi," 102–103.

68 Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales*, 69. "Свет падал в ноги поэта – он лежал, как в ящике." Shalamov, "Sherri-Brendi," 101.

69 Wilfried Schoeller, *Leben oder Schreiben*, 189.

70 Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales*, 71. "Жизнь входила сама как самовластная хозяйка … Он не жил ради стихов, он жил стихами." Shalamov, "Sherri-Brendi," 103.

so different from the marble that constitutes a statue of Apollo, and is also animated by poetry.[71] On this background, Mandelstam the person is reduced to fiction (a word closely related to *fetish*—something that is shaped, formed or devised), while his corpse is realized in a poetics of meta-materialization. There is no distance: not between the subject and the object of writing, nor between the subject and the object of terror. In other words, there is no *Bewältigung*.

Shalamov's poetics of conflict may rather correspond with Iurii Lotman and Boris Uspenskii's binary model of Russian culture.[72] Because Orthodox theology denies the existence of purgatory, there is no neutral zone in this life in which antitheses may be synthesized. Even the most minor action may lead to either salvation or banishment. No reconciliation with the past is possible, because in a binary system any change must entail the eschatological dissolution of all preceding experiences, signs, and values.[73] Given the re-Stalinization in Russia today, it may well be argued that *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* never happened in the post-Soviet political landscape. It is almost as if Shalamov's self-deconstructive testimony from what he considered as "Hell" dictates the contemporary contradictions in Russian historical discourse: "The author of *The Kolyma Stories* [Shalamov himself] regards the concentration camp to be a negative experience in man's life, from the first to the last hour. Man should not know it, should not even hear about it."[74]

5 Conclusions

Performativity and tactility break with phenomenological prerequisites for writing. In *The Phaedrus*, Plato judged texts as imprecise *re*presentation of thought. In contrast to speech, texts are read in the absence of their origin, the author. Indeed, Jacques Derrida has noted, absence is the most specific attribute of text. Texts are not performative; and, although they are written

71 See Belyi, "Smysl iskusstva," *Simvolizm kak miroponimanie*, 124.

72 Shalamov's acquaintance with Lotman is reflected in his letters. See Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 6, 432, 594.

73 Iurii Lotman, Boris Uspenskii, "Die Rolle dualistischer Modelle in der Dynamik der russischen Kultur" [The Role of Dualistic Models in Russian Culture], *Poetica, Zeitschrift für Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft*, vol. 9 (1) (1977).

74 "Автор КР считает лагерь отрицательным опытом для человека – с первого до последнего часа. Человек не должен знать, не должен даже слышать о нем." Shalamov, "O proze," 148.

on physical materials, the tactile, material paper-body itself does not convey any message. Texts are authorless and their bodies lifeless. Like icons they are *acheiropoietic*—without origin—but never *autopoietic*. However, if the cataclysms of the 20th century transcend the limits of reason, then literary testimony must transcend accordingly. Performativity or autopoiesis are utopias of Shalamov's meta-textual memory. It is this fictional u-topos, or non-place, which, supported by tactile strategies, bears the testimony of Shalamov. In his first letter to Solzhenitsyn in 1961, Shalamov commits his life to this strategy:

> For my part I have long time ago decided to devote the rest of my life to this truth. I have written thousands of poems, hundred tales. Despite difficulties I have in the last six years published a volume of hurt poems, poem-invalids, where every poem is truncated, mutilated.
>
> Со своей стороны я давно решил, что всю мою оставшуюся жизнь я посвящу именно этой правде. Я написал тысячу стихотворений, сто рассказов, с трудом опубликовал за шесть лет один сборник стихов-калек, стихов-инвалидов, где каждое стихотворение урезано, изуродовано.[75]

Poems are identified as truncated, mutilated, tactile bodies. The anthropomorphization of textual matter constitutes the most authentic testimony to the suffering in the camps. Implicitly, Solzhenitsyn is seen as not having understood what threshold the Gulag means for writing—a criticism which is founded in Shalamov's self-perception as modernist.[76] Shalamov criticizes Solzhenitsyn for his presumed lack of tactile sensibility: "It is evident that the hands of Shukhov had not been frozen, since he puts his hands into cold water. Twenty-five years have passed, and I still cannot put my hands into icy water."[77]

Tactile strategies in Shalamov derive, first, from artistic practices of the 1920s; second, from his Gulag experience as a fragile I-person, denied the

75 Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 6, 288–289.

76 In a theatrical play written by Shalamov, "Solzhenitsyn" utters: "Мне не по душе все эти модернизмы." Shalamov, *Vechernie besedy* [Evening Conversations], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 7, 383.

77 "Сразу видно, что руки у Шухова не отморожены, когда он сует пальцы в холодную воду. Двадцать пять лет прошло, а я совать руки в ледяную воду не могу." Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 6, 284.

writer's descriptive distance from the events to be narrated ("Pluto ascending from hell"). Against this double background of revolution and banishment Shalamov translates Belyi's turn from products to processes—the specificity of writing and painting—into physiological matter. Shalamov's Plutonian authorship may indicate the Ruler of the Underworld; the coldest, most distant (planet-like) body in the solar system (like Kolyma in the Soviet empire); and the ultimate 20th-century symbol of spatial disaster: plutonium.[78] Tactility is endowed with the performative power of abolishing distances, which in "Plutonian," nuclear terminology are known as fission and fusion; and thus provides the meta-textual techniques for memorializing cataclysmic places: Kolyma, Auschwitz and Hiroshima.

In the concentration camps, bodies convey their existential conditions, the "raw material" of corporality. The body must return to its specificity, to the memory of its physiological formation in formless entities like glycogen and proteins. The body promotes its self-presence with diseases and hunger: "The reason is that, after hunger and frost, even writing letters became a painful labor, even the letters in words seemed to be the most wonderful among wonders…"[79] The specificity of the body is reflected in poems reduced to the foundation of writing, to the letter as the smallest and most homogeneous—i.e. the most specific—building material of the text.

Like fleeting lava, the author's body shall be able to transform into whatever form art requires. For modernism this means the creation of forms hitherto not experienced in painting. Shalamov, as a representative of a modernism after modernism, turns bodies into media for his Plutonian authorship, for state violence. In this Shalamov is not only fighting with the evil from his past. He is also *reproducing* it: not in political practice, but in a meta-textual "non-place," or literal u-topia. In the most explicit way his writing touches on a crucial problem in 20th-century literary testimony: the mutual reversal of the roles of perpetrator and victim. His "modernism" appears almost as an anagram of "mass-murder."

However, these critical remarks cannot outweigh the submerged tendencies in Shalamov that run parallel to his prose. In two letters to Nadezhda Mandelshtam, he emphasizes the moral obligations of writers to restore har-

78 Shalamov refers to Niels Bohr as his source for the concept of the author as "participant." "O proze," 144.

79 "Причина та, что после голода и холода даже письма было мне писать мучительным трудом, даже буквы в словах казались чуть ли не чудом из чудес…" Shalamov, "Poet iznutri" [The Poet from Inside], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, 165.

mony between the present and the past.[80] Similar to Solzhenitsyn, Shalamov is in these cases closer to traditional ethical ideals of the 19th-century Russian intelligentsia. In one single sentence, written to Irina Sirotinskaia in 1975, with *Kolyma Stories* and all his major writings finished, Shalamov finally reaches his personal point of *Bewältigung*:

> Nothing, except love
> and gratitude,
> is kept in my heart.
>
> Ничего, кроме любви
> и благодарности
> в моем сердце не хранится.[81]

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80 "Утрачена связь времен, связь культур – преемственность разрублена, и наша задача восстановить, связать концы этой нити … Тут мне кажется, дело не в обыкновенности, а в нравственной ответственности, которую принимает на себя поэт." Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 6, 412, 416.

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CHAPTER 6

"A Grudge-holding Body": Body and Memory in the Works of Varlam Shalamov

Franziska Thun-Hohenstein

And frostbite scars
caused by shaking hands with ice
have learned how to restrict movement
forever.

И рубцы отмороженья
От рукопожатий льда
Ограничивать движенья
Научились навсегда.

VARLAM SHALAMOV

1 Introduction: Memory and Oblivion

In the Kolyma concentration camps Varlam Shalamov experienced the "destruction of the human being by the state" on his own body.[1] Those who arrive at Kolyma, at the "pole of ferocity,"[2] ended up in the death zone, literally losing their individual "I" and turning into "human material." The biopolitics of the regime did not expect these persons to survive. The state did not require a formal death sentence to condemn them to destruction by cold, hunger, heavy physical labor and beatings.

These were the extreme conditions under which Shalamov managed to persevere. His works are the creative writings of a survivor, who, nevertheless,

1 Varlam Shalamov, "O proze" [On Prose], in idem, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh* [Collected Works in Six Volumes] (Moscow: 2013), vol. 5, 157.

2 Vitalii Shentalinskii, *Raby svobody: V literaturnyh arkhivakh KGB* [Slaves of Freedom: in the KGB's Literary Archives] (Moscow: 1995), 179.

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remained in a twofold state of numbing—not only physically and mentally traumatized, but also enveloped in the officially imposed oblivion of post-Stalinist Soviet society. For all the half-hearted attempts made during the years of Khrushchev's "thaw," open discussion of the violence perpetrated against human beings remained silenced and suppressed. Under these conditions, Shalamov saw the search for literary expression that could embody the changed understanding of a human being caused by the general "scaling/proportion drift" experienced in the Kolyma camps as an aesthetic and moral task—to preserve the memory not just of his own experience, but also that of thousands of other inmates. Further, this quest for verbal embodiment of that human experience undoubtedly had a therapeutic effect on Shalamov himself.

In this chapter, I outline the unique features of memory strategies in Shalamov's poetry, as opposed to his prose. My initial assumption is that Shalamov did not have a theoretically grounded concept of memory (whether based on psychoanalysis or other models of memory). It seems more likely that he proceeded intuitively, from the experiences of his own life and the Soviet policy of forgetting the Terror. Further, his artistic quest unfolded under conditions of direct or implicit dialogue with literary models of memory used by other authors, such as Marcel Proust, Nadezhda Mandelstam, and Ilia Ehrenburg. In continuing the conversation on the interactions between body, memory, and writing initiated by other researchers,[3] it is worth reiterating some theoretical premises and theses concerning Shalamov's writing that can serve as a point of departure for further reflection.

Theoretically oriented works on the mechanisms of memory emphasize the connection between remembering and forgetting and, in particular, the constitutive value that forgetting has for memory.[4] Paul Ricoeur, referring to Harald Weinrich's study *Lethe: The Art and Critique of Forgetting*,[5] notes the

3 See, for example, Luba Jurgenson, "Spur, Dokument, Prothese. Varlam Šalamov's Erzählungen aus Kolyma" [A Trace, a Document, a Prosthesis. Varlam Shalamov's "Kolyma Stories"], *Osteuropa* 6 (2007), 169–182; Fabian Heffermehl, "Nerukotvornost' i problema mnemotekhniki Gulaga" [Acheiropoieta and the Issue of Gulag Mnemonics], *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach*, vol. 76 (2015), 215–245.

4 See for example Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses*. [Spaces of Remembrance. Forms and Changes in Cultural Memory] (Munich: 1999); Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit. Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* [The Long Shadow of the Past: Cultures of Memory and the Politics of History] (Munich: 2006).

5 Harald Weinrich, *Lethe. Kunst und Kritik des Vergessens* [Lethe. The Art and Critique of Forgetting] (Munich: 2000).

importance of "a measure in the use of human memory" and that memory has to "negotiate with forgetting, groping to find the right measure in its balance with forgetting."[6] In Russia, it was Aleksandr Veselovskii who pointed out that, within memory, our images of events, persons, and facts could fade, and still remain "in a dark, hidden region of our consciousness, like much that we've undergone and experienced (*perezhitoe*), apparently forgotten, but then they suddenly overwhelm us as an inexplicable revelation."[7] In examining the historical and cultural aspects of this interaction between memory and oblivion, it is necessary to pay attention to the practice of dealing with historical memory within society, and the relationship between the private and the public spaces at the particular point in history. When the political authorities have forced upon a society a regime of forgetting historical events perceived as being dangerous, this relationship between memory and oblivion, between the past, the present, and the future, is broken. As a result, both society and the individuals within it find themselves in a situation of enforced amnesia. The problem is further exacerbated concerning traumatic events and their psychological consequences: here, the symptoms may surface only many years later. A muted, not "worked-through," suppressed, or repressed memory can produce heightened symptoms of individual or collective trauma. Whereas the autobiographical prose of survivors of the Holocaust and the Gulag often emphasizes the vital, salutary role of oblivion, memory, and displacement, theoretically oriented studies often bring to the forefront the danger of uncontrolled, negative, psychosomatic symptoms of trauma.

Aleida Assmann, a German researcher working on the mechanisms of cultural memory, points out that the potential for mental disorders may be unconsciously transmitted from generation to generation: "This traumatic connection between generations can only be interrupted when it becomes possible to translate the separated and unconscious elements of trauma into conscious forms of memory. Therefore, therapy is directed towards freeing the trauma from its opaque nucleus by articulating it and making it part of the individual's conscious identity." Assmann stresses that, for this, "a social and political context is required, more precisely a memorial framework, where

6 Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: 2004), 413.

7 "где-то в глухой темной области нашего сознания, как многое испытанное и пережитое, видимо забытое и вдруг поражающее нас, как непонятное откровение." Aleksandr Veselovskii, *Izbrannoe*: *Istoricheskaia poetika* [Works: Historical Poetics] (St. Petersburg: 2011), 72.

empathic attention would be given to the separated and repressed memories, allowing them to establish a place for themselves within social memory."[8] An absence of such a public space, which provides the communicative practices and forms required for articulating trauma, aggravates the situation of the trauma survivor. In the case of an historical trauma, the negative impact tends to reverberate through generations.

When exploring Shalamov's literary memory strategies, one has to remember that the said strategies, as well as his general reflections on the mechanisms of memory, on the relationship between forgetting and memory, or on the balance between the body and the mind required for the resurrection of the senses, are always based on his own experience of traumatic memory. Shalamov was aware of this, as can be seen, for example, in his letter to Frieda Vigdorova (1965): "The experience of [prison] camp life is a wholly negative one. One should not be there—even for a day, even for an hour. I saw many things that a human being should not, has no right to see. Traumas of the mind are irreparable. The mental 'frostbite' is irreversible."[9] Judging by his central statements as well as by his self-reflections that are embedded into the *Kolyma Stories*, Shalamov made no distinction between conscious, unconscious (preconscious), and traumatic memory. He proceeded from the conviction that "It's easier for a person to remember good and kind things and forget the evil ones. Memories of evil weight us down, and the art of living, if it exists at all, is, in fact, an art of forgetting."[10] While grasping the live-saving value of oblivion where his own experience was concerned, Shalamov devoted his life after

8 "Эту травматическую связь между поколениями можно прервать лишь тогда, когда удается перевести отщепленные и бессознательные элементы травмы в сознательные формы памяти. Поэтому терапия направлена на то, чтобы за счет артикуляции высвободить травму из ее непрозрачного ядра и сделать ее частью сознательной идентичности индивидуума." "… необходим общественный и политический контекст, точнее – мемориальная рамочная конструкция, внутри которой расщепленным и подавленным воспоминаниям уделяется эмпатическое внимание, в результате чего они обретают свое место в социальной памяти." Aleida Assmann, *Dlinnaia ten' proshlogo. Memorial'naia kultura i istoricheskaia politika* [The Long Shadow of the Past: Cultures of Memory and the Politics of History], accessed August 13, 2018, https://fil.wikireading.ru/80731.

9 "Опыт лагерной жизни – весь отрицательный. Даже день, даже час не надо там быть. Я видел много такого, чего человек не должен, не имеет права видеть. Душевные травмы – непоправимы. Душевные 'обморожения' – необратимы." Shalamov to F. A. Vigdorova, in *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 6, 364.

10 "Человек лучше запоминает хорошее, доброе и легче забывает злое. Воспоминания злые – гнетут, и искусство жить, если таковое имеется, – по существу есть искусство забывать." Shalamov, "Pamiat'" [Memory], in *Sobranie sochnienii*, vol. 4, 440.

Kolyma to the goal of preserving prison camp experience in order to incorporate that knowledge—translated into words and therefore conceptualized and comprehended on a personal level—into a collective memory of the history of the twentieth century.

2 Resurrecting Memory through Literature

In his prose, poetry, and essays, Shalamov attributes numerous capabilities to memory. Memory can preserve, torture, cause pain and screaming, yet also die out, fade, hide, and lie. In the manuscript of his memoirs "The Twenties" (1962), he refers to the difficulties imposed on him by the sheer unreliability of memory: "Memory is an unreliable tool, the scales and proportions our assessment is based on are inevitably biased. What is important is not to remember an event, but rather to feel it in the right way."[11] It is worth noting that Shalamov, while proceeding from the fundamental, ontological significance of his Kolyma experiences, often shifts his train of thoughts from discussing mechanisms of memory to the nature of creative process in terms of poetry or prose. In a poem written in 1963, he explicitly mentions forgetting as a threatening barrier to poetic creativity:

> I failed to hold with an effort of my quill
> All that—it seemed—had happened yesterday
>
> That's what I thought: "It's nothing, really.
> I can write a poem at any time.
>
> My stock of feelings would last me a hundred years,
> An indelible mark has been etched upon my soul.
>
> As soon as the right time comes upon me,
> Everything will be resurrected—as if on the retina of my eyes."
>
> Yet, the past lying at my feet
> Has spilled through my fingers like sand,

11 "Память – инструмент ненадежный, а масштабы оценок неизбежно смещены. Важно не то, что вспоминать какое-нибудь событие, а правильно почувствовать его." Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, f. 2596, Varlam Shalamov, list of files 1, depository item 6., sh. 2. This insight on the autobiographical narration was crossed out by Shalamov and thus was not included into the typed out copy.

The living truth was buried in bygones,
Unconsciousness, forgetfulness, oblivion.

Не удержал усилием пера
Всего, что было, кажется вчера.

Я думал так: "Какие пустяки!
В любое время напишу стихи.

Запаса чувства хватит на сто лет –
И на душе неизгладимый след.

Едва настанет подходящий час,
Воскреснет все – как на сетчатке глаз."

Но прошлое, лежащее у ног,
Просыпано сквозь пальцы, как песок,
И быль живая поросла быльем,
Беспамятством, забвеньем, забытьем…[12]

The initial hope of the narrator—that his "stock of feelings," an "indelible mark" the past had left on his soul, would serve him as an inexhaustible source of creativity—is pitted against the realization of an encroaching "forgetfulness, oblivion" (in Russian, the alliteration in the last words "zabveniem, zabytiem" sounds like a phonetic echo of "zapas" ["stock"]). In later commentaries, Shalamov briefly remarks on "the impotence of human memory, the insignificance of human nature," and then, softening his verdict on mankind, explains laconically: "This is an eternal human property."[13] How does one escape the state of oblivion? What are the strategies that can overcome forgetfulness? These questions continued to occupy him, in prose and in poetry.

For Shalamov, a work of art does not merely represent a retelling or a picture of past events rendered in poetry or prose. In his understanding, a "living life/truth" and an artistic image of that experience recreated through the use of words are fundamentally different in nature. Explaining his aesthetic credo in a letter to Julii Shrejder on March 24, 1968, he emphasizes: "Reflect life? I do not want to reflect anything, I do not have the right to speak for anyone

12 Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, 400.

13 "бессилие человеческой памяти, ничтожество человеческой натуры"… "это извечное человеческое свойство." Ibid., 491. Shalamov added that for him it was one of the fundamental poems of the "Doroga i sud'ba" [Road and Fate] collection (1967).

else (except, perhaps for the dead of Kolyma)."[14] As already stated in his essay "On Prose" (1965), he repeats (referring to the *Kolyma Stories*) that the task he had set himself was "to speak out about certain patterns of human behavior under certain circumstances."[15] In other words, he was seeking to bring together in his writings his own concentration camp experiences and those of thousands of other inmates of Kolyma. Shalamov identifies the re-creation of long-forgotten feelings as a pivotal prerequisite for finding a language that can allow one to "express" and re-create one's experience. The very process of revival through an act of creative writing for him is linked with a special kind of perseverance, a spiritual strength, and an exertion applied to perception. In a lengthy, undated letter to Irina Sirotinskaia that at times resembles an aesthetic manifesto, Shalamov describes this process as a painful act of will:

> An attempt to unravel one's own nature on paper, to extricate it out of the brain and illuminate certain nooks and crannies of it is also internally driven. After all, I clearly see that I can resurrect in my memory all the myriads of pictures I have seen in my sixty years—the endless tapes with all that information are stored somewhere within my brain, and by applying my willpower I can make myself remember everything that I have seen in my life, any day or hour of my sixty years. Not just one day in the past, but all my life. Within the brain nothing is erased. This work is excruciating, but not impossible. It all depends on the exertion of the will, on the way the will is focused. But the fact is that this exertion sometimes brings up unnecessary pictures—whereas to satiate, satisfy and fill the daily artistic passion even a few pictures are sufficient. Once unused, those pictures are layered up again, to be recalled some ten or twenty years hence.
>
> There is no controlling the memory, and artistic memory and its needs are vastly different from those of scientific memory. I have long given up trying to put my entire storehouse, my entire arsenal in order. I do not know, nor do I even want to know, what is stored there. And in any case, if a part of that stockpile, a tiny, negligible part, translates well onto paper, I do not block it, I do not stop the source of the brook„ I do not interfere with its chatter. …

14 "Отражать жизнь? Я ничего отражать не хочу, не имею права говорить за кого-то (кроме мертвецов колымских, может быть)." Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 6, 538.

15 "высказаться о некоторых закономерностях человеческого поведения в некоторых обстоятельствах." Ibid.

All of that is pushed out of the brain on its own—like an impulse from a cardiac muscle—it is formed from within and by itself, and every obstacle causes pain.

Внутренним же является попытка разгадать самого себя на бумаге, вывороτить из мозга, осветить какие-то дальние его уголки. Ведь я отчетливо понимаю, что в силах воскресить в своей памяти все бесконечное множество виденных за все шестьдесят лет картин – где-то в мозгу хранятся бесконечные ленты с этими сведениями, и волевым усилием я могу заставить себя вспомнить все, что я видел в жизни, в любой день ее и час моих шестидесяти лет. Не за один прошедший день, а за всю жизнь. В мозгу ничего не стирается. Работа эта мучительна, но не невозможна. Тут все зависит от напряжения воли, от сосредоточения воли. Но дело в том, что напряжение иногда приносит ненужные картины – и для насыщения, удовлетворения, наполнения ежедневной страсти творческой достаточно немногих картин. Однажды не использованные картины опять наслаиваются, чтобы быть вызванными через десять или двадцать лет.

Управления памятью не существует, а художественная память, ее потребность много отличается от памяти научной. Я перестал давно пытаться навести порядок во всей своей кладовой, во всем своем арсенале. И не знаю, и даже не хочу знать, что в нем есть. Во всяком случае, если часть скопленного, малая, ничтожная часть хорошо идет на бумагу, я не препятствую, не затыкаю рот ручейку, не мешаю ему журчать. …

Из мозга все это выталкивается само – на манер толчка сердечной мышцы, – все это формируется внутри само, а всякое препятствие – причиняет боль.[16]

Here Shalamov describes the revival of memories as a pure "effort of will" and portrays his brain as a "storehouse" where all the images seen in his life are kept. Within this "storehouse" nothing is erased—and so, any pictures of the past that this exertion summons but are not required immediately might be resummoned decades later. This line of reasoning resonates with a meta-poetic reflection written by Rainer Maria Rilke as part of his work *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, which Shalamov copied into one of his notebooks in

16 Shalamov to I. P. Sirotinskaia, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 6, 496–497.

1963.[17] The imagery itself might also refer directly to the Proustian metaphor of a reminiscence as an undeveloped photographic negative that is preserved within the body until it is woken up again by the mind.

Yet Shalamov was unable to—and would not agree to—"have the great patience to wait" (Rilke) for the memory to come again at some point: he emphasized the need for an exertion of will and the excruciating nature of that "work." Moreover, for Shalamov, the very purpose of that act of will and the act of creation is not to bridge the gap of time—the weakening memory sliding into oblivion ("The living past was buried in bygones, / Unconsciousness, forgetfulness, oblivion…")—but rather to get through to the memories that are blocked by one's consciousness. The key to comprehending the specifics of Shalamov's literary memory strategies is the special status he attaches to the memory of the body. In terms of the process of memory, Shalamov often distinguishes between the potentialities and boundaries of the memory of the mind (brain) and those of the memory of the body, without discussing exactly how the elements of traumatic memory that have been separated and bottled up within a person get transformed into conscious memory.

While exploring the human body as a medium or a vehicle for memory and emphasizing that the bodily memory of wounds and scarring is more reliable than memory of the mind, Aleida Assmann refers to Friedrich Nietzsche's remark in his *On the Genealogy of Morality*: only something which never ceases to cause pain remains in the memory. With an eye on the ancient rituals of initiation and practices of physical torture, Nietzsche considered pain "the most powerful aid to mnemonics" (*Schmerz als dem mächtigsten Hilfsmittel der Mnemotechnik*).[18] When dealing with memory and trauma, Assmann, along with other researchers, stresses that, on the contrary, an injured body is the

17 A long quotation from Rilke in particular, contains the following: "But it is still not enough to have memories. One must be able to forget them, if they are many, and to have the great patience to wait for them to come again. For it is not the memories themselves. Only when they become blood in us, glance and gesture, nameless and no longer to be distinguished from ourselves, only then can it happen that in a rare hour the first word of a line arises in their midst and strides out of them." Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, trans. Burton Pike (London: 2008), 14. "И все-таки мало еще одних воспоминаний: нужно уметь забыть их и с безграничным терпением выжидать, когда они начнут снова всплывать. Потому что нужны не сами воспоминания. Лишь тогда, когда они претворятся внутри нас в плоть, взор, жест и станут безымянными, когда их нельзя будет отделить от нас самих—только тогда может выбраться такой исключительный час, когда какое-нибудь из них перельется в стихотворение." Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, 280.

18 Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume*, 244–245.

opposite of memory: a traumatic event can neither be forgotten nor recalled. According to Assmann, memory that has not gained access to consciousness remains, so to speak, recorded in the body itself; it cannot lapse into oblivion, for it is always available: such a body is trauma made flesh. Accordingly, she describes the body as a "durable body scripture" (*dauerhafte Körperschrift*).[19]

Proceeding from this theoretical premise, Susi K. Frank has recently made a comparison between certain features of literature as a medium of body memory in the works of Lidia Ginzburg and Varlam Shalamov.[20] She points out that the literature of the second half of the twentieth century seems to be circling between the two poles—on the one hand, there is the Proustian discovery of the body as a kind of medium for the revival of the desired and seemingly utterly forgotten past; and on the other hand, the traumatized body in the witness literature created by Gulag and Holocaust survivors. In her view, both Ginzburg and Shalamov proceed from a belief that the boundaries of body memory can be transcended only within the medium of literature. Both Ginzburg in her *Notes of a Besieged Person* and Shalamov in the *Kolyma Stories* speak of "overcoming the memory that had ploughed its way into one's body through an act of creative writing, and of doing in in a twofold way: overcoming the trauma and successfully fighting the reduction to a (physically) collective self by using an individual one."[21] While agreeing with Frank, I would add that both Ginzburg and Shalamov use literary techniques of distancing (*literarische Distanztechniken*) in order to reproduce with their writing (or, in their writing) the very process of depersonalization that they had experienced—Ginsburg during the Siege of Leningrad, and Shalamov in the Kolyma concentration camps) and that had been literally inscribed onto their bodies.

Returning to Proust, surely it is not by chance that his concept of "involuntary memory" (*mémoire involontaire*) and, in particular, his reflections on

19 In the original: "An etwas, das gegenwärtig präsent ist, daran kann man sich nicht erinnern, man verkörpert es. Das Trauma kann man in diesem Sinne als eine dauerhafte Körperschrift bezeichnen, die der Erinnerung entgegengesetzt ist." ["What exists in the present may not be remembered. That would be embodied. The trauma may then be read as a durable body scripture, which is opposite to memory."] Ibid., 247.

20 Susi K. Frank, "Literatur als Medium des Körpergedächtnisses. Überlegungen zu Lidia Ginsburg und Warlam Schalamow" [Literature as a Medium of Body Memory. Reflections on Lidia Ginzburg and Varlam Shalamov], in *Schalamow. Lektüren* [Shalamov. Readings], ed. Dirk Naguschewski and Matthias Schwartz (Berlin: 2018), 122–136.

21 "преодолении врезавшейся в тело памяти в акте литературного письма, причем в двояком смысле: как преодоление травмы и как преодоление редукции на (физически) коллективное через индивидуальное." Ibid., 136 (translation by the present author).

the body as a reliable vehicle of memory come to mind when we consider Shalamov's literary concept of memory.[22] His obviously autobiographical short story *Marcel Proust* (1966) tells us that Shalamov has first encountered Proust's prose in Kolyma when he, as a paramedic, suddenly gained access to *The Guermantes Way* (Le Côté de Guermantes), published in Russian in 1936. The story begins with a simple statement of facts: "The book has vanished."[23] The fate of the book is revealed only at the very end of the story when the narrator finds out who stole it, and that he was apparently right in his suspicions that the "heavy folio" had ended up in the hands of career criminals and had been transformed "into playing cards." The narrator asks himself a question—a question that slides into a poetological analysis that, in essence, seeks to express his admiration for Proustian prose:

> Who is going to read this strange prose, almost weightless, as if ready for space flight, where all the scaling/proportions are shifted and displaced, and one cannot tell big from small? Memory, like death, makes all of us equal, and it's the right of the author to remember the servant's dress and forget the lady's jewelry. This novel rolls back the boundaries of verbal art to a staggering degree.
>
> Кто будет читать эту странную прозу, почти невесомую, как бы готовую к полету в космос, где сдвинуты, смещены все масштабы, где нет большого и малого? Перед памятью, как перед смертью,—все равны, и право автора запомнить платье прислуги и забыть драгоценности госпожи. Горизонты словесного искусства раздвинуты этим романом необычайно.[24]

By the time the story was written Shalamov may have read the first four volumes of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*.[25] In 1968 he called Proust a genius

22 On the similarities and differences between Proust and Shalamov, see Claude Haas, "Die Madelaine im Gulag. Pirouetten über Warlam Schalamow und Marcel Proust" [The Madelaine in the Gulag. Pirouettes on Varlam Shalamov and Marcel Proust], in *Schalamow. Lektüren* [Shalamov. Readings], 78–91.

23 "Книга изчезла." Shalamov, "Marsel Prust" [Marcel Proust], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, 138.

24 Ibid., 139.

25 In the 1930s Adrian Frankovskii's translations of *Swann's Way* (1934) and *The Guermantes Way* (1936) were published; *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower* (1935) and *Sodom and Gomorrah* (1938) were translated by Andrei V. Fedorov.

who had created a work that "was held together with pure style alone."[26] In this sense it is telling that in this short story Shalamov describes Proust's prose by using the same expression that he frequently employs to depict the radically changed post-prison camp Weltanschauung ("all the scaling/proportions are shifted and displaced"). The problem of Proust, as defined by Merab Mamardashvili, is a "problem of having to recreate life, that is, the fullness of the senses."[27] It seems that Shalamov might have endorsed that definition of creativity. Yet his own literary search for lost feelings had its basis in a traumatic experience, so his aesthetic and ethical quest was conducted within a fundamentally different framework. Consequently, this issue of "having to recreate life"—that is, "the fullness of the senses" understood by Shalamov in the *Kolyma Stories* as a "resurrection of the senses"—becomes a search for literary strategies for depicting people in a condition "close to a state of beyond humanity" "(близкому к состоянию зачеловечности)", in order to "record[ing] those few things that still remain within a human being" ("фиксаци[и] того немногого, что в человеке сохранилось").[28] In terms of style, this aim brings to the forefront the succinct language, the conciseness, and the principle of reduction and rejection of everything that is superfluous: "Feeling has to come back, defeating the control of time and shifting judgements. It is only under this condition that life can be resurrected."[29]

Despite the many fundamental differences, the parallels with some Proustian reflections (as in *Sodom and Gomorrah*) almost beg to be considered:

> For with the troubles of memory are closely linked the heart's intermissions. It is, no doubt, the existence of our body, which we may compare to a jar containing our spiritual nature, that leads us to suppose that all our inward wealth, our past joys, all our sorrows, are perpetually in our possession. Perhaps it is equally inexact to suppose that they escape or return. In any case, if they remain within us, it is, for most of the time, in an unknown region where they are of no service to us, and where

26 Shalamov uses this expression with a reference to Flaubert and places it in quotation marks. (Shalamov to Julius Schrader, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 6, 540.)

27 "Проблема воспроизведения жизни, то есть полноты чувств." Merab Mamardashvili, *Psikhologicheskaia topologia puti* (*M. Prust. "V poiskakh utrachennogo vremeni"*), [Psychological Topology of the Way (Marcel Proust: "In Search of Lost Time")] (Moscow: 2014), 233.

28 Shalamov to I. P. Sirotinskaia, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 6, 487.

29 "Чувство должно вернуться, побеждая контроль времени, изменение оценок. Только при этом условии возможно воскресить жизнь." Shalamov, "On Prose," *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, 152.

> even the most ordinary are crowded out by memories of a different kind, which preclude any simultaneous occurrence of them in our consciousness. But if the setting of sensations in which they are preserved be recaptured, they acquire in turn the same power of expelling everything that is incompatible with them, of installing alone in us the self that originally lived them.[30]

> Car aux troubles de la mémoire sont liées les intermittences du cœur. C'est sans doute l'existence de notre corps, semblable pour nous à un vase où notre spiritualité serait enclose, qui nous induit à supposer que tous nos biens intérieurs, nos joies passées, toutes nos douleurs sont perpétuellement en notre possession. Peut-être est-il aussi inexact de croire qu'elles s'échappent ou reviennent. En tout cas, si elles restent en nous c'est, la plupart du temps, dans un domaine inconnu où elles ne sont de nul service pour nous, et où même les plus usuelles sont refoulées par des souvenirs d'ordre différent et qui excluent toute simultanéité avec elles dans la conscience. Mais si le cadre de sensations où elles sont conservées est ressaisi, elles ont à leur tour ce même pouvoir d'expulser tout ce qui leur est incompatible, d'installer seul en nous, le moi qui les vécut.[31]

It is not only that the Proustian link between memory lapses and cardiac arrhythmia seems to echo the above-quoted passage where Shalamov states that revived memories are pushed out in a way "akin to an impulse given by a cardiac muscle," and that anything that obstructs this process brings physical pain.[32] Throughout the novel Proust dwells on the idea of a body as a kind of a storehouse for past feelings. In the opening chapter of *Swann's Way* the past comes back to the narrator at the moment of waking up, through the restored sensation in his limbs. "The composite memory of ribs, knees, and shoulder-blades"[33] shows him the rooms in which he had slept at one point or the other. (*Sa mémoire, la mémoire de ses côtes, de ses genoux, de ses épaules, lui présentait* […]) Other examples could be quoted that speak of memories sleeping within

30 Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past* (New York: 1932), vol. 2, 114.

31 Marcel Proust, "Cardiac Arrhythmia," in idem, *À la recherche du temps perdu III, Sodome et Gomorrhe, Édition publiée sous la direction de Jean-Yves Tadié, Avec, pour ce volume, la collaboration d' Antoine Compagnon et de Pierre-Edmond Robert Éditions Gallimard* (Paris: 1988), 153–154.

32 See note 16. I would like to thank Claude Haas for the reference to a Proustian comparison of memory lapses to cardiac arrythmia.

33 Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu I, Du côté de chez Swann* (Paris: 1987), 6.

the body waiting for an involuntary awakening to bring the narrator the joy of seeing the lost world restored to him. As noted, here the point is not some alleged Proustian influence in Shalamov, but rather the echoing segments in their literary concepts of memory.

The difference between Shalamov's literary concept of memory and Proust's *mémoire involontaire* lies in the fact that, as Frank points out, Shalamov's poetics (first and foremost in the *Kolyma Stories*) that is also built on resurrecting his own—harrowing—feelings, is aimed at reviving traumatic memory he had understood as a document not of merely personal but also collective experience (see his claim that he might have had the right to speak for the dead of Kolyma). Shalamov's poetic worldview, in poetry and in prose, is imbued with the "proportions drift" that, in his understanding, was caused by crossing the fundamental ethical and epistemological boundary in human history that Kolyma and Auschwitz represent.

Building on Frank's suggestions, we might formulate the following thesis: Shalamov is using the memory of his "grudge-holding" body to "revive feelings" through the very act of writing, and to "explode" the trauma experienced in Kolyma from within.[34] In other words, he aims to overcome his own defense mechanism, the protective barrier, and make the trauma discursively accessible, defusing it by providing it with a verbal embodiment.

3 The Body as a Medium of Memory in Shalamov's Poetry

Although this these may be applied to the sum of Shalamov's works, there is an important difference between his prose and poetry where the status of the body is concerned. In Shalamov's prose (especially in the *Kolyma Stories* and his memoirs about Kolyma), the human body is present in two capacities. Firstly, at the level of portrayal there is the body of an inmate: an atrophied body, whose parts have been transformed into alien appendages, ungoverned by human will to the extent that control over the physically alienated and disappearing body is utterly lost. Secondly, at the instance of speech there

34 On using "literature of fact" operative poetics for that purpose, see Franziska Thun-Hohenstein, "Varlam Šalamov's Arbeit an einer Poetik der Operativität. Teil 1" [Varlam Shalamov's Work with Operative Poetics. Part 1]; Susanne Frank, "Varlam Šalamovs Arbeit an einer Poetik der Operativität. Teil 2" [Varlam Shalamov's Work with Operative Poetics. Part 2], in *Evidenz und Zeugenschaft. Für Renate Lachmann* [Evidence and Testimony. For Renate Lachmann], ed. Susanne Frank and Schamma Schahadat, *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach* 69 (2012), 15–29; 31–50.

is the body of the author, a survivor body that holds within itself the knowledge of what it has endured and implicitly connotates every literary utterance and every verbal re-enactment of what it has experienced in Kolyma. In Shalamov's poetry (unlike his prose), the image of a suffering, wounded human body in prison camp conditions is almost absent. What seeps into the foreground is the motif of memory in the lyrical "I" (often as an *alter ego* of the author). In some poems the Kolyma experiences are translated—as we shall see—into the realms of a life that at first glance seems entirely disconnected from the prison camp experience.

Shalamov repeatedly speaks about the relationship between the body and the brain (mind); he sees it as vital for survival under the extreme conditions of the Kolyma camps, and also for reviving the memories of that experience. A keynote explanation is provided in his letter to Aleksandr Kremenskii (1972):

> Everything is tested against one's own soul and its wounds, everything is tested against one's own body, in the memory of muscle and sinew that resurrects certain scenes. A life that is recalled with your whole body, not just your brain. To expose this experience when the brain is serving the body in terms of immediate real salvation, and the body, in turn, is serving the brain, storing within its gyri the plotlines of such a kind, that one would have rather had them forgotten.
>
> Все проверяется на душе, на ее ранах, все проверяется на собственном теле, на его памяти, мышечной, мускульной, воскрешающей какие-то эпизоды. Жизнь, которую вспоминаешь всем телом, а не только мозгом. Вскрыть этот опыт, когда мозг служит телу для непосредственного реального спасения, а тело служит, в свою очередь, мозгу, храня в его извилинах такие сюжеты, которые лучше было бы позабыть.[35]

He treats the human body as the main vehicle of memory. It is expressly the corporeal (muscle) memory to which he attributes the capacity to "resurrect" the forgotten "plotlines."

Shalamov often employs bodily or physiological metaphors and motifs in his meta-poetical reflections. He demands that those writing prose after Auschwitz and Kolyma "explore their material with their very hide—not just with their mind, not just with their heart, but rather with every skin pore and every

35 Shalamov to Aleksandr Kremenskii, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 6, 581.

nerve of theirs."[36] Luba Jurgenson has analyzed how skin becomes a metaphor for text in Shalamov's prison camp prose.[37] In his short story "Glove" (1972), for example, a dead leather glove from the hand of a goner becomes a multilayered symbol on the verge of body and text, at the same time challenging Shalamov's status as an author. A story written by a hand now covered with a "glove" of newly grown skin becomes a replacement for a dead glove that, in turn, exists only within literary fiction. The narrative itself becomes the place where memory is constituted and stored.[38]

Human beings in the Kolyma camps are locked up and left to the mercy of violence—both external (freezing cold, exhausting hard labor, beatings, physical bullying from the guards and career criminals) and internal (torpor and growing estrangement from and exhaustion of the body, mind, and language). The body of an inmate, as Jurgenson has noted, exists "on the brink of incorporeity and lifelessness."[39] In many short stories Shalamov stresses that within the prison camps there was only one aim—to survive. And for that, one had to rely on instincts alone. Andreev, the protagonist in the short story *The Typhus Quarantine* (1959), who was turned into a "slag" "dumped by the mine," yet, against all odds, managed to survive, is preparing—while being held at the quarantine barracks—for a "great battle" in which he would "use his own bestial cunning" to "oppose the beast":

> The possibilities were limited. But he was going to be cleverer here and trust his body more. And his body would not let him down. He had been

36 "исследовать свой материал собственной шкурой – не только умом, не только сердцем, а каждой порой кожи, каждым нервом своим" Shalamov, "O proze," 148. One can also point at a possible link between Shalamov's body-based metaphors in his metapoetic utterances and the terminology employed by the Formalists whose works Shalamov knew quite well. Irina Sirotkina and Il'ia Kalinin have demonstrated that in the wake of the violence to which that era subjected human beings, "with Formalists [the] body experience served 'as a certain pliable model for constructing theoretical concepts'," and that the "living and feeling" body served as a "source of meaning." See Il'ia Kalinin, "Istoria kak iskusstvo chlenorazdelnosti (Istoricheskii opyt i metaliteraturnaia praktika russkikh formalistov)" [History as the Art of Articulation (The Historical Experience and Metaliterary Practice of Russian Formalism)], *New Literary Observer*, no. 71 (2005), 106; Irina Sirotkina, "Shestoie chuvstvo avangarda" [The Sixth Sense of the Avant-Garde], *New Literary Observer*, vol. 125 (2014), 30. The internal connections between Shalamov's work and Formalist theory require further exploration.

37 See Luba Jurgenson, "Kozha—metafora teksta v lagernoi proze Varlama Shalamova" [Skin as a Metaphor for Text in Varlam Shalamov's Prison Camp Prose], in *Telo v russkoi kulture* [The Body in Russian Culture], ed. G. A. Kabakov and F. Kont (Moscow: 2005), 340–344.

38 See Jurgenson, "Spur, Dokument, Prothese."

39 Jurgenson, "Kozha—metafora teksta v lagernoi proze Varlama Shalamova," 341.

> let down by his family and by his country. Love, energy, abilities had all been trampled underfoot and smashed. All the justifications his brain tried to find were false, they were lies, and Andreev realized this. Only the animal instinct aroused by the mines could and did indicate a way out.[40]

> Возможностей было мало. Но здесь он будет умнее, будет больше доверять телу. И тело его не обманет. Его обманула семья, обманула страна. Любовь, энергия, способности – все было растоптано, разбито. Все оправдания, которые искал мозг, были фальшивы, ложны, и Андреев это понимал. Только разбуженный прииском звериный инстинкт мог подсказать и подсказывал выход. [41]

The process of gradual yet inevitable exhaustion of the senses—first and foremost of that of smell, touch, and hearing—is described in several of the *Kolyma Stories*.

Prison camp experience, Shalamov emphasized when referring to the horrifying practices of 1937, was "an organic experience, akin to a built-in reflex."[42] A retrospective analysis of human depersonalization using literature as the medium drove him to the terse verdict (varyingly delivered in different stories) that a human being "lives by the same principle as a stone, a tree, a bird, a dog."[43]

Within the camps, both body and memory inexorably faded and waned. In his essay "Memory," which serves as a kind of preface to a set of memoirs about Kolyma, Shalamov notes that malnutrition has led to his brain cells being inadequately supplied, and thus memory had "inevitably weakened for purely

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40 Varlam Shalamov, *Kolyma Stories*, trans. Donald Rayfield, (New York: 2018), 262.

41 Shalamov, "Tifoznyi karantin" [The Typhus Quarantine], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, 208. The sheer stamina of the human body under the conditions of inhumanely hard labour, freezing cold and utter exhaustion is one of the issues behind varying verdicts on a "goner" or "last-legger" in Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov. See Franziska Thun-Hohenstein, "Überleben und Schreiben. Varlam Shalamov, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Jorge Semprún" [Survive and Write. Varlam Shalamov, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Jorge Semprún], in *Überleben. Historische und aktuelle Konstellationen* [Survival. Historical and Current Constellations], ed. Falko Schmieder (Munich: 2011), 123–145.

42 "опытом органическим, вроде безусловного рефлекса" Shalamov, "Tridtsat' vos'moi" [Thirty-eighth], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 4, 468.

43 "живет тем же, чем живет камень, дерево, птица, собака" Shalamov, "Zaklinatel' zmei" [Snake Charmer], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, 120.

physical reasons. Of course, it would not be possible to recall everything."[44] Though he often remarked how he possessed an exceptional memory and was able to memorize and recall numerous images he had seen, as well as many faces and facts, his memory apparently not only failed to store everything, but also proved barely manageable. The tale of his experiences of 1938 when he was "bogged down," sliding "into hell," "hour by hour with every passing day, every day and every night," began with the question "Where does it [that year—F.T.-H.] lie, in what corner, what part if it has been forgotten, what is left of it?" Further on, a rhetorical question emphasizes the sheer unexpectedness of the things that unwittingly break the surface of oblivion: "What is memory going to cast ashore here?"[45]

While repeating that remembrance is always an attempt to re-experience the feelings of the past, Shalamov, in speaking of the creative process, emphasized not only the enormous mental effort and strain it took him to bring back the past, but also (on more than one occasion) that in order to engage in the act of writing he had to hold in his hand or to see an object that could serve as a trigger, thus initiating the process of writing. In a brief meta-poetic manifesto embedded in the short story "The Gold Medal," the process of writing a story is defined as a "search; and the dim consciousness of the brain has to be invaded by the scent of a shawl, scarf or a kerchief lost by a male or a female character."[46] For example, in his essay *Big Fires*, Shalamov refers to his mother's shawl, which had been destroyed together with the family archives, as an obstacle that prevents him from writing down his reminiscences of her. In his prose, that element of tactility is often crucial in reviving a sentiment.[47] A similar approach is confirmed in the initial lines of a 1964 poem that hints at an implicit resonance with a Proustian concept of memory regarding the degree to which various senses might be important to the lyrical "I": (the poet): "He is feeling the events with his skin. / What do color and taste matter? / A prompt

44 "неизбежно слабела по чисто физическим причинам. Она, конечно, не вспомнит всего." Shalamov, "Pamiat'" [Memory], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 4, 440.

45 "Где он [that year—F.T.-H.] лежит, в каком углу, что из него забыто, что осталось?" "Что тут выбросит память?" Shalamov, "Tridtsat' vosmoi," 458–459.

46 "поиск, и в смутное сознание мозга должен войти запах косынки, шарфа, платка, потерянного героем или героиней." Shalamov, "Zolotaia medal'" [The Gold Medal], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, 222. Material, tangible items play an enormous symbolic role in the *Kolyma Stories*. One such item is often a scarf (usually, a worn-out woollen scarf that serves as a memento of a lost domestic life, or a dirty honeycomb towel that comes to replace it on the inmate's neck).

47 See Jurgenson, "Kozha—metafora teksta v lagernoi proze Varlama Shalamova."

given by the muses / Resembles a revelation." Though this assumption may appear dubious, it seems reinforced by the first line of the second stanza: "His space is void of air"[48]—here the parameter seems to echo Shalamov's description of Proustian prose in *Marcel Proust* as "almost weightless, as if ready for space flight." Besides, for Proust it is precisely color and taste that play the main role in reviving past sensations.[49]

Including examples from Shalamov's poetry would require far more detailed discussion of the fundamental differences in the ways of producing meaning in poetry and prose, but that lies beyond the scope of this chapter. On the other hand, further examination of Shalamov's poetry could supplement what has been said here with new aspects as to the importance of body memories for the resurrection of past feelings, as well as enabling a discussion of poetic understandings of prison camp experiences.

A perceptive observation as made by Luba Jurgenson, speaking at the Shalamov Conference in Prague in 2013: that prose and poetry (primarily landscape poetry) in Shalamov's works are related to each other as metatexts. However, in the published version of Jurgenson's paper, poetry was not included in the reflections on landscape pieces: the analysis focused on the *Kolyma Stories* alone.[50] In the oral version, the thesis that Shalamov's landscapes were not mere slice-of-life nature sketches, but were infused with historical memory, and that "the embedded scenic fragments play the part of meta-memories,"[51]

48 "Он чувствует событья кожей. / Что цвет и вкус? / На озарение похожа / Подсказка муз." "Его пространство безвоздушно." *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, 402.

49 Claude Haas, a specialist in German studies, has offered an astute observation: that the many references to scent or taste in the *Kolyma Stories* did not contribute directly to the study of prison camp life, but were linked on the functional level to a juxtaposition between the camp world and sensations of the pre-camp life. In his study of the differences between Proustian literary strategies of memory resurrection and those employed by Shalamov, Haas also notes a paradoxical claim made by Shalamov, that he had lost his sense of smell in early childhood (*The Fourth Vologda*)—which turns all his references to scent into a purely literary device. See Haas, "Die Madelaine im Gulag. Pirouetten über Warlam Schalamow und Marcel Proust," 78–91.

50 Luba Jurgenson, "Peizazhnaia zarisovka kak metatekst v proze Shalamova" [Landscape Pieces Used as Metatext in Shalamov's Prose] in "*Zakon soprotivleniia raspadu*." *Osobennosti prozy i poezii Varlama Shalamova i ikh vospriiatiia v nachale XXI veka. Sbornik nauchnykh trudov* ["The Law of Decay Resistance:" Special Features of Varlam Shalamov's Prose and Poetry and Their Perception at the Beginning of the 21st Century. Conference Proceedings], ed. L. Babka, S. Soloviev, V. Esipov, Ya. Makhonin, (Prague/ Moscow: 2017), 99–109.

51 "вкрапленные в текст пейзажные фрагменты выполняют функцию метавоспоминания" Ibid., 100.

referred also to poetry. In particular, Jurgenson talked about the "mode of disappearance" that is present in Shalamov's landscapes (here I am quoting from my notes). That is an apt expression, as that "mode of disappearance" is connotes not only the message (human beings disappearing in the camps), but also of the narrative means—with their succinctness and reduction of language in both prose and poetry.

In his poems about nature, the severity and harshness of the northeastern Siberian region (cold, hunger, bare trees, no people, only snow and stone) and the terrible fate of a prisoner in Kolyma often indicated only implicitly (by omission) are contrasted with the rhythmic uniformity of the verses, with meter, rhythm and tone, and their sheer melodiousness, that, in turn, generate ambivalence, and lead to a collision of two antithetical worlds (see, for example, the poem "Taiga," 1949).

In 1965, Shalamov wrote a poem contrasting the "few things" he "told" in his lyrical landscape sketches—and his memory that existed "in a frenzy":

I have told people only a few things
So that my thunderous memory
Would not unduly terrify
The roads of their daily life with its unrest.

And I did not do that by chance,
Hiding human sins,
Making my poems
Overflow with figures of silence.

It is clear enough for the wise,
That lyrical winter tale
Of those mother-of-pearl mornings,
Of the unembellished snow.

Yet my memory is in a frenzy,
Yet memory is free and strong
And it can rescue from oblivion
The treasures from the very bottom.

Рассказано людям немного,
Чтоб грозная память моя
Не слишком пугала тревогой
Дороги житья и бытья.

И я поступил не случайно,
Скрывая людские грехи,
Фигурами умолчанья
Мои переполнив стихи.

Достаточно ясен для мудрых
Лирический зимний рассказ
О тех перламутровых утрах
О снеге без всяких прикрас.

Но память моя в исступленье,
Но память вольна и сильна,
Способна спасти от забвенья
Сокровища с самого дна.[52]

At the same time, the "I" of this poem never doubts that his story remains quite legible "for the wise," even though it is overflowing with "figures of silence."

Having tasked himself with saving from oblivion "the treasures from the very bottom" of memory—the terrible "treasures" about which human beings should know nothing—Shalamov stresses that in verse he often speaks of them not directly, but only allusively, in allegorical form. Restoring the lost past through poetry requires an approach different from an attempt to narrate the prison camp experience in prose. Shalamov provides a more detailed description of his goal—to make his poetry multidimensional—in his own commentary on the poem "Oda kovrige khleba" (Ode to the Loaf of Bread) (1957): "Exploring nature with the help of poetry—that's just one side of the issue. The other, and perhaps the main one, is my desire to say something directly to the reader, though that utterance might be shrouded in allegory, in hints and in comparisons."[53]

However, there are also poems that speak directly of prison camp experiences, As to motifs, what§ come to the foreground are the physical feelings, the traces of suffering that §etched onto the body once and for all. The passionate desire to escape from one's wounded body is expressed in the poem "Zhelanie" (A Wish) from the collection "Rosebay":

52 Ibid., 405–406.

53 "Исследование природы с помощью стихов – это только одна сторона дела. Вторая, и м.б., главная, – желание сказать что-то прямо читателю, хотя и закутанное в аллегории, в намеки, в сравнения." Ibid., 478.

A Wish
My wishes are so modest!
I would like to be a stump,
A human stump…

Arms lost to frostbite,
Legs lost to frostbite…
How boldly my shortened body
Would have lived.

I would have gathered saliva in my mouth,
I would have spat upon beauty,
Right into its disgusting snout.

So that the image of God in it
Would not be prayed to by men
Remembering the face of cripples.

Желание
Я хотел бы так немного!
Я хотел бы быть обрубком,
Человеческим обрубком…

Отмороженные руки,
Отмороженные ноги…
Жить бы стало очень смело
Укороченное тело.

Я б собрал слюну во рту,
Я бы плюнул в красоту,
В омерзительную рожу.

На ее подобье Божье
Не молился б человек,
Помнящий лицо калек…[54]

This desperate scream of the lyrical "I" longing for a chance to break free of the lies surrounding it, or, in Lidia Ginsburg's words, to "break the circle"—that is,

54 Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, 189.

find within itself the strength for a reaction commensurate with that extreme situation, the experiment performed on him in the prison camps, forever scarring him, body and soul. Phonetically the word "stump" (*obrubok*) evokes the word "self-mutilator" (*samorub*). In the prison camp situation people chose self-mutilation, thinking that it might delay their death. This motif is often mentioned in the *Kolyma Stories*. A similar wish—to get rid of one's wounded body, to become a human stump, to find "the strength to spit in their ugly mugs for everything they've been doing to us"[55]—is voiced by a prison camp inmates in the short story *The Funeral Speech* (1960). In the poem above, a passionate desire of the lyrical "I" for a gesture (a wordless, purely physical one) of protest is directed not only against the political authority and the aesthetics of socialist realism. Shalamov is protesting against the traditional categories of the aesthetics of beauty and—more broadly—against the Christian image of man. For ethical and aesthetical proportions are also displaced. Beauty (the image of God) becomes a "disgusting snout" that those who remember "the face of cripples" could only spit upon. The use of the word "face" in the singular points at the destruction of human personality in the camps: all the cripples have just "one" face—no face at all.

It is not just one's body and soul that are traumatized, numb with cold and frostbitten—words share the same fate. Also they require a "resurrection." In the poem "Glagoly" (Verbs), recorded in a notebook in 1959 and only recently published, the "I" names himself as a "self-mutilator (*samorub*) / of the Fringe lands" and takes on the task of leading "the verbs to a warm place":

> Verbs
> My brain cannot contain
> My former visions.
> No bookish gloss can hide
> The despair of my judgements.
>
> A sack of severed verses,
> Like human fingers,
> Like a burden of other people's sins,[56]
> I hump upon my shoulders.

55 Shalamov, *Kolyma Stories*, 571. "В себе силу плюнуть им в рожу за все что они делают с нами." Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, 423.

56 "Bear ye one another's burdens" (Galatians 6:2).

For sure, it must contain
Tragic evidence—
That Tiutchev's hand,
That Pushkin's little finger.

They are poor—just like me,
Like me, they are disabled,
And the offences done to them
Are the ones done to me.

But I am not yet a corpse
And my blood is that of the living,
I am just a self-mutilator
Of the Fringe lands.

For the verbs there is no peace,
The verbs are bare and naked,
I should have long ago
Led the verbs to a warm place.

Глаголы
Вместить не может мозг
Былых моих видений.
Не скроет книжный лоск
Отчаянья суждений.

Отрубленных стихов,
Как пальцев человечьих,
Как груз чужих грехов
Мешок взвалив на плечи.

Там есть наверняка
Трагический гостинец—
То Тютчева рука,
То Пушкина мизинец.

Как я—они бедны
И тоже инвалиды,
И им нанесены
Такие же обиды.

Но я еще не труп
И кровь моя—живая,
Я только саморуб
Окраинного края.

Глаголам нет житья,
Глаголы голым-голы.
Давно бы должен я
Увесть в тепло глаголы.[57]

The intensity of both the "sound pattern" and the message serves as a counterpoint to the rhythmic uniformity (iambic trimeter in the original) of the poem.[58] The lyrical "I" is speaking back in time (the "visions" in question are the "former," past ones), but yet is dangling between life and death; he is "not yet a corpse"—only a self-mutilator, self-cutter. The Fringe land is not just the edge of the earth, the pole of cold; it is also the threshold between life and death, where even verbs have no peace. The way the sound material is organized expands the semantic volume of the text, on the one hand evoking (especially in the last stanza) a comparison between "*glagol—goly—golod—holod*" [verb—naked—hunger—cold], and on the other hand laying the groundwork for an exit into desired *teplo* [warmth]. After all, the lyrical "I" is "not yet a corpse"; that "I" is still capable not only of gestures of protest, but also of direct action, of leading "the verbs to a warm place"—of resurrecting them.

Shalamov was certain that he had found aesthetic devices capable of extracting memories of his experiences from the depths of his body and resurrecting them. If in the "new prose" such a resurrection may be achieved by using plotlines and by telling stories of what happens to a person under extreme conditions of cold, starvation and physical violence, then in poetry this is more likely to be realized in allegorical form, by juxtaposing the metaphorical and the associative fields, and the rhythmic, stylistic, and sound structures of the poem.

A comparison between "severed verses" and severed human fingers is an indirect reference to yet another issue: in his works on the nature of poetry,

57 Varlam Shalamov, *Neizvesnye stikhi* [Unknown poems] (Moscow: 2015), 79–80.

58 Varlam Shalamov, "Zvukovoi povtor—poisk smysla. Zametki o stikhovoi garmonii" [Repetition of Sounds—a Quest for Meaning. Notes on Poetic Harmony], in Varlam Shalamov, *Vse ili nichego. Esse o poezii i proze* [Everything or Nothing. Essays on Poetry and Prose] (St. Petersburg: 2015), 388.

Shalamov emphasizes the importance of the somatic aspect of the writing process. In his article "Zvukovoi povtor—poisk smysla. Zametki o stikhovoi garmonii" [Repetition of Sounds—a Quest for Meaning. Notes on Poetic Harmony], first published in 1976, he writes, to underscore the importance of the first stanza for creating "the sound frame of a future poem": "The first stanza uses all the personal experience of every cell in the poet's body, his nerves and muscles, the sinews of memory are strained."[59] Considering that he, by his own admission, has "shouted his stories out," that they follow the laws of the muscles, it can be said that Shalamov seemed to be challenging the performative power of the "resurrected" word with himself as a test subject. This somatic issue, the strain of corporeal sensations at the point where word meets body, is often thematized by Shalamov in verse as well.[60]

4 "Grudge-bearing Body" vs. "Memory of Past Joy"

Within this context, Shalamov's work on the poem "Memory," written in 1957 and published in 1958 in the March volume of *Moskva* literary journal, is highly significant:

If you have once wielded with skill
Either an axe or saw,
Your muscles retain
A memory of past joy.

Things that were learned by rote
By a careful hand
That kept hold of the chisel
Under a hammer stroke,

Are regained every single time
Almost effortlessly
By the balanced motion
Not governed by the eyes.

59 "Для первой строфы используется весь личный опыт всех клеток тела поэта, нервов, мышц, напрягаются мускулы памяти." Ibid., 387.

60 See for example his poems "Stikhi—eto stigmaty…" [Poems are the Stigmata] and "Zhest" [Motion].

This clever craft,
These working skills,
By all odds, will forever
Remain lurking within our body.

So much in our life is washed away
By the mighty river of time –
Multi-colored dabs of daily routine,
Good deeds and evil names.

The brain does not remember, the brain cannot
And does not even try to save
What is known to muscles and skin,
The memory of fingers, the memory of shoulders.

These precise movements,
That have been lost long ago,
Like a flow of a poem
Recited by heart, from memory.

Если ты владел умело
Топором или пилой,
Остается в мышцах тела
Память радости былой.

То, что некогда зубрила
Осторожная рука,
Удержавшая зубило
Под ударом молотка,

Вновь почти без напряженья
Обретает каждый раз
Равновесие движенья
Без распоряженья глаз.

Это умное уменье,
Эти навыки труда
В нашем теле, без сомненья,
Затаились навсегда.

Сколько в жизни нашей смыто
Мощною рекой времен
Разноцветных пятен быта,
Добрых дел и злых имен.

Мозг не помнит, мозг не может,
Не старается сберечь
То, что знают мышцы, кожа,
Память пальцев, память плеч.

Эти точные движенья,
Позабытые давно,
Как поток стихотворенья,
Что на память прочтено.[61]

It is immediately apparent that what is missing in this seven-quatrain poem is an explicitly expressed lyrical "I." The poem opens with a rhetorical address ("If you have once wielded with skill"), which does not, however, signal a direct reference to a hypothetical interlocutor, or a romantic intimation of the statement. Twice this address goes together with a plural possessive pronoun ("in our body," in "our life"), but it indicates a transition from a specific, individual experience to the generalized one of a certain collective "we" (that "we" does encompass the lyric "I" as well; the latter, however, remains beyond the scope of the statement).

Starting with the first stanza, the poem seeks to affirm the "memory of past joy," associated with manual, undeniably artisan labor (an axe, saw, chisel and hammer)—skills acquired long ago, most likely in one's youth. And although the poem later states that the "mighty river of time" has washed "Multicolored dabs of daily routine,/ Good deeds and evil names" out of one's life, the emphasis lies with the "clever craft" that remains lurking within "our body" *forever*. The expression "clever craft" can be deciphered here as an easily recoverable (through one's body, muscle memory) "balanced motion," as "precise movements," memorized a long time ago. In the phrase "умное умение" ("clever craft") there is an obvious alliteration (semantically referring to the mind), but there also seems to be a clear echo present here of a formula

61 Shalamov, "Memory," *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, 332–333. After being published in the *Moskva* literary journal, this poem was included in the collection Varlam Shalamov, *Shelest' listiev. Stikhi* [The Rusting of Leaves. Poems] (Moscow: 1964), 27–28.

deeply embedded in the Russian Orthodox tradition—the one of "умное делание" (mental doing/pure prayer). In Hesychasm and, more widely, in the religious practice of monks and ascetics, it indicates the constant repetition of the Jesus Prayer in order to achieve inner union with God.

Unceasing repetition of prayer is otherwise seen as a joyous undertaking, because through it one acquires a state of special peace, where divine grace is bestowed. In Shalamov's rendition, however, the possibility of linking the "умное делание" (mental doing) formula with a religious meaning is definitely muted. The moment of recalling the "past joy" that is brought to the forefront is associated exclusively with working at creating a material object (with saw, chisel, and hammer).[62] And the penultimate stanza employs rhythmical and stylistic repetitions ("The brain does not remember, the brain cannot…," "The memory of fingers, the memory of shoulders") to affirm insistently—once again—the priority of the body memory.

However, in the final stanza, physical labor is explicitly linked with intellectual work, thereby giving the entire poem a new semantic twist. By comparing the long-forgotten "precise movements" with a "flow of the poem" recited "by heart/from memory" the author once again affirms poetic memory and its capacity for reawakening—even after long periods of oblivion. The groundwork has already been laid in the second stanza: the process whereby the hand learned certain movements required to wield the tools of manual labor with skill is described with the schoolroom expression "learned by rote."

The restoration of the lost (under camp conditions) memory for poetry and, more fundamentally, that for language and words, is a repeated motif in Shalamov's oeuvre. Before returning to this, I would like to mention the story "Afinskie nochi" [Athenian Nights] (1973) from the *Glove, or KR-2* collection, the last cycle of the *Kolyma Stories*. This first-person story tells of the "poetic nights" of sorts held at the prison camp hospital, where, in the early hours of the night, three paramedics would recite their favorite poems to each other, thus compiling an "oral poetry anthology."[63] In describing the restoration of the narrator's poetic memory, Shalamov emphasizes the physiological or somatic nature of that process: "I strain my brain, that has given so much time to poetry back in the day, and, to my own surprise, I see how—without

62 For that reason, this poem could be said to stand in opposition to the short stories *Wheelbarrow I* and *Wheelbarrow II*, which deal with the fact that slave labor skills of the Kolyma wheelbarrow-men were literally etched onto their bodies.

63 Shalamov, "Afinskie nochi" [Athenian Nights], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, 415.

any volition of mine—long-forgotten words appear in my voice box."[64] The emphasis here lies with the fact that words and poems return to the narrator unwittingly, almost in a mechanical way, appearing in his "voice box" without his volition. (A similar explanation for the words coming back—as a purely physiological act, with no will applied—is also found in the short story "Sentenciia" [Sentence].) In "Athenian Nights" it is easy to recognize the author's own experience in this observation. The title, "Athenian Nights," has associations to warmth: the resurrection of words that are led away to a warm place. In the poem "Memory"—in its final, published version—this experience remains hidden.

The only way to understand how this poem is based on the author's personal experience of prison camps is by accessing archival materials, which make it possible to trace the creative process through which the poem was composed. Judging by notebook number 11 of the year 1957, Shalamov had been working on it with a certain degree of intensity (starting with a sheet no. 37it and up to the sheet no. 46it).[65] Two points stand out immediately—firstly, the wide range of figurative interpretations of the motif of memory; secondly, the fact that the general theme has been given a conceptual definition of "Human Memory" (sh. 37it.). This title/thematic inscription in pencil (at the top center of the page) foreshadows the first sketches—the fragments of individual lines with rhyming keywords and versions of two stanzas. These first entries are of particular interest with regard to whether the author's prison camp experience underpin this specific poem. Unfortunately, space limitations in this chapter preclude analysis of all the entries, or tracing the entire process that produced this poem.

Immediately after the aforementioned putative title of "Human Memory" come the words "~~Мозг не по~~ Забывает скоро мозг." [~~The brain does not re~~ The brain is quick to forget.] (crossed out in the original—F.T.-H.). They refer to Shalamov's concept of the fragility of memory of the mind, as opposed to the memory of the body.

In the next entry the motif of the North appears: "Memory of northern lights / in the scorching night / that I used to twirl in my hands in my childhood / And a tool again."[66] A contraposition of the fierce North (scorching—

64 "Я напрягаю свой мозг, отдавший когда-то столько времени стихам, и, к собственному удивлению, вижу, как помимо моей воли в гортани появляются давно забытые мной слова." Ibid., 414.

65 Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, f. 2596, Varlam Shalamov, list of files 3, depository item 23.

66 "Память северных сияний / В обжигающей ночи / Что в руках вертелось в детстве / И опять средство." Ibid.

freezing—night) and childhood experience (in the northern town of Vologda) disappears in the subsequent entry. The latter covers unfinished versions of two stanzas (together with erasures and amendments). It directly refers to the traces left by the prison camp that write themselves onto one's body forever, turning that body into a reliable vehicle of memory: "And the grudge-bearing body / Will harbor for many years / The way the snowstorm had twirled it, / Wiping out the light and tracks. // The hands are too retentive // and the muscles hurt too much // And frostbite scars / caused by shaking hands with ice / … movements of the past / … / … / Will preserve forever…"[67] Shalamov keeps working on the motif of a physically experienced, even painful, incessantly torturous body memory, condensed into the expression "grudge-bearing body"—varying it in all kinds of ways. For example, there are (amended) lines emphatically stating: "It's not the brain that stores the travails / That's been forgotten long ago."[68] Shalamov distils his search down to the following version of the poem (written down without a title):

> And frostbite scars
> Caused by shaking hands with ice
> Have learned how to restrict movement
> forever.
>
> And the grudge-bearing body
> Will harbor for many years
> The way the snowstorm had twirled it,
> Wiping out the light and tracks.
>
> So that is why upon that too white,
> Show-white sheet
> A sprawling body
> Is going numb in silence.
>
> И рубцы отмороженья
> От рукопожатий льда

67 "И злопамятное тело / Затаит на много лет / Как метель его вертела / Заметая свет и след // Слишком памятливы руки / И слишком мускулы болят / И следы отморожений / От рукопожатий льда / … былых движений / … / … / Сберегут навсегда" Ibid., sh. 37it. crossed out or illegible word are omitted—F.T.-H.

68 "Но беречь воспоминанья / Ведь не мозгу вручено" [Yet preservation of one's memories / Is not trusted to the brain.] or "Ведь не мозг хранит страданья / Позабытые давно." Ibid., sh. 38.

Ограничивать движенья
Научились навсегда.

И злопамятное тело
Затаит на много лет
Как метель его вертела
Заметая свет и след.

Потому на слишком белой
Белоснежной простыне
Разметавшее[ся] тело
Цепенеет в тишине.[69]

In this initial full version of the poem, the physical traces of the camp are directly thematized—there is frostbite as well as the force of the northern snowstorms, and the numbness of the body that pursues it into the present, lying "on a too white," "snow-white sheet." The tale is dominated not just by the unceasing bodily suffering, but also by the fear that the "grudge-holding body" might revive the horror of the experience in all its tangible power and cast one back into the cold yet again. (A similar motif of fear of returning to Hell triggered by a physical sensation is experienced by the narrator in the story "Pripadok" (Fit).)

Compared with the multifaceted semantics delivered by the final text of "Memory," the message of the first version is more immediately tied to the feelings of an inmate and to the sensations of an irrevocably traumatized body. While continuing to explore the topic of memory in poetry, Shalamov apparently sought to go beyond the motif framework of the terrible memories of Kolyma. He did not abandon his belief in body memory as being the more stubborn of the two, but he moved on to a general poetic reflection on the mechanisms of human memory—beyond the limits of directly named experience of Kolyma. In the final version, the memory of past horror, etched into the surviving body, must make way for the "memory of past joy." The later self-commentary indicates that this reading was very important to the poet: this poem was "my contribution to Russian lyrics, my discovery in the interpreta-

69 Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, f. 2596, Varlam Shalamov, list of files 3, depository item 23, sh. it. 40it. This version was pencil-marked with a circle and a cross inside it. The reflexive suffix *sia* in the brackets is missing from the original, apparently by mistake, for it is present in another record containing the same lines.

tion and artistic enactment of this most important human theme, the most burning issue of our time."[70]

By defining memory as "the most burning issue," Shalamov is implicitly referring to the state of collective forgetfulness imposed upon Soviet society by the political regime. While dealing with the general logic of human memory, the poem affirms its precedence, for—apparent oblivion notwithstanding—it remains stored within the body, and is therefore available for resurrection. From this angle, the poem "Memory" can be read as a poetic meta-reflection that—unlike the *Kolyma Stories*—does not portray the prison camps explicitly, but still tries to interpret Shalamov's new understanding of the nature of the human being.

Translated from the Russian by Elena Mikhailik

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70 "своим вкладом в русскую лирику, моей находкой в трактовке и художественном решении этой важнейшей человеческой темы, острейшей темы нашего времени." Ibid., 475.

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CHAPTER 7

Certain Properties of Rhyme: Poetic Language Touching Abomination

Irina Sandomirskaia

1 Varlam Shalamov's Theater of Cruelty

Kolyma, the territory of absolute evil and pure violence, is quintessential of Russia's 20th-century modernity, just as its counterpart, the Kolyma of Varlam Shalamov's *Kolyma Stories*, is the quintessential work of artistic violence and cruel realism unprecedented in Russian literary tradition. Shalamov was well aware—and pointed this out many times in his writing—that the reality of Kolyma transcended any cerebral, mental, or aesthetic (literary-historical) order, a world far beyond the limits of thinking and representation. In his artistic manifesto, "O proze" (On Prose), he proclaimed his purpose in elaborating his signature writing style to produce literature that would not only be a document but "*more than* a document."[1] In this contribution, I intend to look for the logic and practice of Shalamov's poetic more-than-documentality in his way of making Kolyma tangible, bypassing the rationality of ideology, and thus eliminating clichés of representation and narration.

Being tangible lies in the nature of things, and corresponding to it in the practices of the observer (here, the writer) is tactility.[2] Here I explore how

1 On "new prose," see Varlam Shalamov, "O proze" [On Prose], in idem, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh* [Collected Works in Six Volumes], vol. 5 (Moscow: 2013), 150–152. This text is also important as original theory of literature; see Elena Mikhailik, "Nezamechennaia revoliutsiia" [An Unnoticed Revolution], in *Shalamovskii sbornik 5*, ed. Valerii Esipov and Sergei Soloviev (Moscow: 2011), 115–142; Josefina Lundblad Janjić, *Writer or Witness: Problems of Varlam Shalamov's Late Prose and Dramaturgy*, PhD Diss. (Berkeley: 2017), accessed June 10, 2018, https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8619j8s5. Specifically, on Shalamov's principle of documentality and authenticity in deformation, Elena Mikhailik, *Nezakonnaia kometa. Varlam Shalamov: Opyt medlennogo chteniia* [Forbidden Comet: Varlam Shalamov, an Exercise in Close Reading] (Moscow: 2018), 124–151.

2 Alois Riegl created a genealogy of art perception developing from tactile (Germ. *taktisch*, in Riegl's later terminology, also *haptisch*) to optical (*optisch*) perception: the optical allowing for the perception of the extension of things, while the tactile gives the sense of the impenetrable materiality, the thingness of an object. Developing Riegl's idea, Walter Benjamin

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tactility becomes poetic in Shalamov's work; and secondly, how a poetic word becomes a means of empirical exploration of reality. I will also consider violence as a specific variety of tactility, inherent both in the object of description (Kolyma) and in Shalamov's mode of writing about it—the violence of the poetic word that seeks to overcome (*preodolet'*) the destructive effects of extermination by nature and political terror embodied in the materiality of Kolyma's camps and natural forces.

In my view, Shalamov's project has an important counterpart and a context for comparison in the work of the modernist painter Francis Bacon. Both are known for the cruelty of their art, their technical abilities in painting and in writing, respectively, to fearlessly explore pain and deformation. Violence is at the center of these two disparate yet comparable artistic universes. Shalamov's tactics in writing should be understood vis-à-vis Bacon's tactic in painting, of transcending, overcoming (*preodolenie*, a key word in Shalamov) "the violence of the represented" by means of "the violence of painting,"[3] the poet acting like "not an Orpheus descending, but a Pluto ascending from hell" ("*Pluton, podniavshiisia iz ada, a ne Orfei, spustivshiisia v ad*").[4]

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proposed a tactility in language: things being able to "communicate themselves" immediately, against the idea of meaning as convention (based on the ideology of representation) and towards an understanding of "all language as onomatopoeia" (Walter Benjamin, "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," in *Selected Writings, Volume 1: 1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings [Cambridge, MA: 2000], 62–74). Tactility in language manifests itself in poetry and translation, words achieving similarity with the object named—instead of alienating the object by denoting it through a generalizing concept (Walter Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty," in *Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927–1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith [Cambridge, MA: 1999], 720–722.) For Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the visible (i.e., perceptible materiality and texture; facticity) relates to the invisible (ideas, concepts, linguistic meanings) as the touching hand relates to the speculating eye. The touch does not produce the (illusory) whole but gives facticity in an immediate contact; things become known not through the mediation of ideas and concepts, but "in the flesh," between the senses of man and the sensibility of things. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: 1968). On Riegl's tactility as part of his anthropology of perception, see Michael Gubser, *Time's Visible Surface: Alois Riegl and the Discourse on History and Temporality in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* (Detroit: 2006), 192–197. For a different approach to tactility, see Fabian Heffermehl in the present volume.

3 Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (New York: 2003), 39ff.

4 Shalamov, "O proze," 151. Unless otherwise indicated, translations from the Russian are mine.—I. S.

2 The Taiga: The Touch of "Irreversible Abomination"

In Shalamov, writing becomes an instrument of artistic experiment and exploration. Things do not appear in ideas, images, or concepts, but come to touch the readers, affecting their perceptions immediately by means of words and rhymes and other poetic tools. In his 1957 poem "Nekotorye svoistva rifmy" (Some Properties of Rhyme), Shalamov compares rhyme to various tools invented for finding the way in darkness: an ultrasound device, a supersensitive magnet, a compass, space radar, or a blind man's walking stick.[5] When touched by the hand or one of these instruments, the matter touches you in return: the touching and the touched become one.[6] So also rhyme should be capable of mobilizing tactility in words and facticity in the surrounding objects—as a means of conveying the tangible reality of Kolyma: it is captured by the poetic language that makes sense by revealing its material relatedness to what it describes. This was also important for Shalamov in his mission of bearing witness.

In this world of lawlessness, "the law is the taiga" (*zakon—taiga*): this maxim of criminal wisdom in the Gulag adequately describes, for Shalamov, Kolyma's total anomie, the wildness and darkness of the primitive chaos imposed on human and non-human nature alike, in the midst of which the regime deploys machines for mass extermination. The poetic word in the taiga becomes something like the instrument of a geologist prospecting the wilderness, or a topographer installing triangulation masts on elevations. But the taiga spreads far beyond the territory of the camp: in God's understanding (*v ponimanii Boga*),[7] the world of humans in general is ruled by the same law of lawlessness as the *taiga* of Kolyma's criminals. In this world without differentiation and measure, the topographer installs geodesic marks for the prospecting and appropriation of the taiga's horrifying secrets.[8]

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5 Shalamov, "Nekotorye svoistva rifmy" [Some Properties of Rhyme], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, 341–343. Words work like instruments and therefore represent continuations of the exploring hand; compare Merleau-Ponty on the role of the hand in the explorative production of facticity, as a thing among things that it touches—as opposed to the speculative eye that seeks to penetrate the hidden essence, idea, and so on. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 130–155.

6 "… the 'touching subject' passes over to the rank of the touched, descends into the things, such that the touch is formed in the midst of the world and as it were in the things." Ibid., 134.

7 From Shalamov's poem "*Pamiat' skryla stol'ko zla*…" ["Memory has concealed so much evil…"]: "Mozhet mir—odna taiga // v ponimanii Boga." *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, 54.

8 Varlam Shalamov, "Graphite," in *Kolyma Tales*, trans. John Glad (Penguin Books, 1994), 503–508.

The taiga is a place without forgiveness, a place of "irreversible abomination," to recall the expression used by Lévinas on National Socialism.[9] Abomination is taboo; it is something with which contact is absolutely prohibited. In her study of Leviticus, the anthropologist Mary Douglas devoted a chapter to the explication of the meaning of "abomination" in the Old Testament, and interpreted the Hebrew word as denoting human action that leads people into contact with something that God forbids them to touch, whether as prey, food, or sex object.[10] Compared to Douglas's earlier definition of the abominable and the unholy (object) as something un-whole,[11] her later interpretation, un(w)holiness no longer refers to the impure objects forbidden to humankind, but to the action of human beings breaking the ban to enter into the forbidden contact (even if inadvertently). The object itself, according to her later reading of Leviticus, is not the cause of danger for humankind and therefore is not to blame: on the contrary, God seems to protect it from intervention by predatory humankind. Thus, the irreversibility of abomination (as in Lévinas' description of the Nazis) means the unforgivability of human beings' action, and not infectious impurity in the object. Similarly, the taiga's nature, as wild, dark, and lawless as it is, is not abomination in itself—no, humankind with its actions is the perpetual cause of abomination. In its mute, tactile language, the taiga tells the topographer stories of abomination committed by human beings in its dark depths. Thus violated, nature itself becomes the victim, together with the prisoners who fall dead in the thousands, their bodies freezing into stone and preserved forever in the eternity of Kolyma's permafrost. Removed from the eyes and understanding of God, the ice and stone of Kolyma's mute nature cannot revolt: but they respond to the act of abomination by preserving its memory forever.

> In Kolyma bodies are consigned not to the earth but to the stones. Stone preserves and reveals secrets. Stones are more reliable than earth. Permafrost preserves and reveals secrets. Every one of those close to us who perished in Kolyma, everyone who was shot, beaten to death, exsanguinated by starvation, can still be identified, even after decades. There were no gas ovens in Kolyma. The corpses wait in stones, in the permafrost. … [T]he eager fire of the willow herb, the furious flowering of the taiga in summer, when it tries to cover up any human activity, good or bad, in

9 Emmanuel Lévinas, *Entre nous: Thinking-of-the-Other* (London: 2006), 179.

10 Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: 1999), 166–169.

11 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: an Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (London: 2002), 50–58.

> grass and foliage. And if I were to forget, so would the grass. But stone and permafrost wouldn't.[12]

> На Колыме тела предают не земле, а камню. Камень хранит и открывает тайны. Камень надежней земли. Вечная мерзлота хранит и открывает тайны. Каждый из наших близких, погибших на Колыме, – каждый из расстрелянных, забитых, обескровленных голодом – может быть еще опознан – хоть через десятки лет. На Колыме не было газовых печей. Трупы ждут в камне, в вечной мерзлоте. … жадный огонь кипрея, яростное цветение летней тайги, пытающейся скрыть в траве, в листве любое человеческое дело – хорошее и дурное. Что трава еще более забывчива, чем человек. И если забуду я – трава забудет. Но камень и вечная мерзлота не забудут.[13]

In describing his memory and experience in the taiga, Shalamov explores evil surrounded only by Kolyma's hundred-year-old trees and million-year-old rocks. His task is to go deep into the heart of Kolyma's darkness, to learn the art of reading its impenetrable depths, and to be prepared for it to disclose its horrors. With his instruments—for instance, rhyme—he measures and maps, leaving marks for memory with graphite pencils on the living flesh of trees (i.e., writing with nature on nature) using "gentle empiricism" to inscribe this territory of irreversible abomination with "biblical reference points":

> When a road is cut through the taiga, each landmark is sighted through the cross hairs of the theodolite. The land has been measured, the taiga has been measured, and we come upon the benchmark of the cartographer, the topographer, the measurer of the earth—recorded in simple black graphite. … The measurement of the taiga, the measurement of Kolyma, the measurement of the prison is based on reliable points of reference, whose authority is biblical.[14]

> В густой тайге прорубают просеки – каждый затес, каждая метка поймана в крест нитей нивелира, теодолита. Земля измерена, тайга измерена, и мы ходим, встречая на свежих затесах след картографа, топографа, измерителя земли – черный простой графит. … И от

12 Varlam Shalamov, "On Lend-Lease," in idem, *Kolyma Stories*, trans. David Rayfield (New York: 2018), 432–434.

13 Shalamov, "Po lendlizu," in *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, 397–399.

14 Shalamov, "Graphite," 504.

> этих надежных, библейских опор тянется измерение тайги, измерение Колымы, измерение тюрьмы.[15]

A simple graphite pencil leaves marks on the flesh of trees that remain forever: the solidarity between human beings and non-man-made materials—wood and carbon—in the preservation of the memory of heinous crimes committed here and the inhuman suffering of the martyrs. Yet even though marked with signs of biblical force, the taiga affords no transcendence and no forgiveness. Frozen into the rocks and waiting for Judgement Day are witnesses without the privilege of transcending the abomination of their impure deaths: "the people of the year 1937 [are] martyrs but not heroes."[16]

The taiga and its nature are humankind's allies and partners in their shared accursed condition, rather than enemies: "The stone and the permafrost will never forget." Forgetting comes from elsewhere: from the civilizing effort of "the editor," or, more broadly, the ideological worker, the functionary of the industry of remembrance and memorialization. Those "editors," *lesoruby* (woodcutters), cut through the dense taiga to transform it into a harmless sparse wood (*redkoles'e*), so that "the bosses"—the commanders on the political front but "marching under the banner of poetry"—could remake the wood into a respectable park, and even decorate it with a couple of statues.[17]

The practices of memorialization as performed by such "editors" pursue a dual purpose: to domesticate the taiga in the interests of aesthetics (or rather, politics under the banner of aesthetics) on the one hand, and to pacify the memory of the surviving witnesses, in the name of political reconciliation, on the other. According to their civilizing logic, "the material" itself in Shalamov's writing is poisonous; there is a dangerous impurity in the taiga of his description; thus, the author or reader who touches upon such "material" runs the risk of being infected. In transforming the taiga into a memorial park, the aim is to achieve a salutary distance between the impurity of the taboo (the taiga) and the reader (to be protected from the taiga's evil). This, however, is also a way of shifting the focus of attention from the criminal (the one who commits an act of abomination) onto the victim (the "impure" thing or being; "the un(w)holy"): a subtle method, protecting the reader against Shalamov's naked physiologism under the pretext of humanism, to transfer historical guilt from

15 Shalamov, "Grafit," in *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, 107.

16 "Люди тридцать седьмого года – мученики, но не герои." Shalamov, "Iz chernovykh zapisei" [From Preliminary Notes], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, 227.

17 Ibid., 291.

those who committed the evil of Kolyma onto those who were fated to suffer or simply witness and remember it. It is in relation to the survivors' memory of Gulag that the socialist humanism of the party-political and literary establishment applies its power to censor and forbid.

3 The Violence of Memory

Innocent nature—the mute witness and victim of abomination—deserves to be explored gently, but humankind, exchanging historical truth and justice for comfort in oblivion, does not deserve this at all. We find similar thinking to 'Pluto ascending' in Nietzsche:

> How do you give a memory to the animal, man? How do you impress something upon this partly dull, partly idiotic, inattentive mind, this personification of forgetfulness, so that it will stick? … This age-old question was not resolved with gentle solutions and methods, as can be imagined; perhaps there is nothing more terrible and strange in man's prehistory than his technique of mnemonics.[18]

In his critique of the "editors" of the past and their "memory parks," Shalamov seems to agree with Nietzsche concerning the price that humankind pays for the knowledge of the past: "blood, torments, and sacrifice." Nietzsche continues:

> When man decided he had to make a memory for himself, it never happened without blood, torments and sacrifices: the most horrifying sacrifices and forfeits (the sacrifice of the first-born belongs here), the most disgusting mutilations (for example, castration), the cruelest rituals of all religious cults (and all religions are, at their most fundamental, systems of cruelty)—all this has its origin in that particular instinct which discovered that pain was the most powerful aid to mnemonics.[19]

As though responding to Nietzsche's "disgusting mutilations," Shalamov describes "the poet's five senses" in his notebooks: "Vision—half-blind, hearing—gone deaf after (beatings with) rifle butts, touch—frostbitten,

18 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Cambridge: 2006), 38.
19 Ibid.

without sensitivity; smell—bad cold; taste—only hot and cold (food) … But there is also a sixth sense, that of creative intuition."[20]

The poet uses open violence in his war against the civilizing censorship of oblivion, an artistic deformation ("mutilation") of what is represented, the practice of the inherent violence of language as opposed to the seduction of the sadistic pleasure of violence in the content of representation. It is only through the violence of form that memory and understanding can capture, get hold of, and make sense of the horror of this content, the taiga itself and how it reproduces terror in thousands of abominable routines and rules. As an anthropological phenomenon, this cannot be captured by direct description using the techniques of the realist novel—and certainly not the socialist realist novel with its genealogy in Belinsky's criticism, Dostoevsky's prophecy, or Tolstoyan historicism, especially with its doctrine of humanism.[21]

The novel can no longer account for the historical experience of the reader. Abandoned by her Orpheus, Eurydice now stays alone in the pitch-dark hell of her historical experience. There is no orphic language to witness about Kolyma, nor language of transcendence. By the end of his life, Shalamov appeared to those around him as someone drowning in helpless rage, violent hatred, and insanity. He lived his final days institutionalized and restrained in a psychiatric ward, desperately revolting against the "literariness" of the reality around him, the mendacity of his small circle of unreliable friends and

20 "Пятъ чувств поэта: зрение – полуслепой, слух – оглохший от прикладов, осязание – отмороженные руки нечувств[ительные], обоняние – простужен, вкус – только горячее и холод[ное] … Но есть шестое чувство – творческой догадки." *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, 259. On the memory of the body as part of Shalamov's anthropology, see Valerii Podoroga, "Derevo mertvykh: Varlam Shalamov i vremia Gulaga. Opyt otritsatel'noi antropologii" [Tree of the Dead: Varlam Shalamov and Time of the Gulag. An Essay in Negative Anthropology], *NLO* 120 (2013), 193–224.

21 "Russian humanist writers of the second half of the 19th century all carry in their souls the great sin of human blood shed under their banners in the 20th century. All terrorists were Tolstoyans and vegetarians, all fanatics were students of Russian humanists." ("Русские писатели гуманисты второй половины XIX века несут на душе великий грех человеческой крови, пролитой под их знаменем в XX веке. Все террористы были толстовцы и вегетарианцы, все фанатики – ученики русских гуманистов.") Shalamov, "O 'novoi proze'" [On New Prose], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, 160. On problems of testimony and fiction in Shalamov, see Sarah J. Young, "Recalling the Dead: Repetition, Identity, and the Witness in Varlam Shalamov's Kolymskie rasskazy," *Slavic Review* 70, no. 20 (July 2011), 353–372; Leona Toker, "Toward a Poetics of Documentary Prose—from the Perspective of Gulag Testimonies," *Poetics Today* 18, vol. 2 (July 1997), 187–222; Leona Toker, "Testimony and Doubt: Shalamov's 'How It Began' and 'Handwriting'," in *Imagined Realities: Fictionality and Non-fictionality in Literary Constructs and Historical Contexts*, ed. Markku Lehtimäki, Simo Leisti, and Marja Rytkönen (Tampere: 2007), 51–67.

secret informers.[22] But for poetry, there is no pacifying in institutionalization, no restraining of its essential negativity.

> Poetry has no progress whatsoever. Poetry is untranslatable … Poetry is unfathomable … By no means does literature reflect the properties of the Russian soul, nor does it predict or demonstrate the future. Least of all is literature futurology, I am afraid.
>
> В поэзии не прогресса никакого. Поэзия непереводима. … Поэзия непостижима … Литература никак не отражает свойства русской души, никак не предсказывает, не показывает будущего. Литература менее всего футурология, к сожалению.[23]

4 The Violence of Art

> Each of my stories is a slap in the face of Stalinism, and like any slap, it has laws of purely muscular nature … A slap in the face must be short and sonorous … The phrase must be short like a slap in the face—this is my comparison.
>
> Каждый мой рассказ – пощечина сталинизму, и, как всякая пощечина, имеет законы чисто мускульного характера. … Пощечина должна быть короткой, звонкой. … Фраза должна быть короткой, как пощечина, – вот мое сравнение.[24]

The mission of the poet is different from that of the martyr, who witnesses against abomination to God. In Pasternak's programmatic letter to Shalamov, in which he responds to the poems sent to him from Kolyma in 1952, he appeals to his younger colleague not to give up poetic craftsmanship in his work on form, even when faced with the terrible task of poetically reflecting the most horrendous reality. In a kind of zigzag escape from the direct question asked by Shalamov, looking for Pasternak's opinion about his poems, Pasternak offers two pieces of advice that obviously contradict each other. On the one hand, the younger poet should avoid excessive "literariness" (Pasternak

22 Irina Sirotinskaia, "Dolgie, dolgie gody besed" [Long, Long Years of Conversations], accessed February 21, 2018, https://shalamov.ru/memory/37/1.html.

23 From Shalamov's letter to Irina Sirotinskaia: *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 6, 499.

24 Ibid., 484–485.

confesses that was his own mistake during his early futurist period, his "pretensions for liveliness and brilliance" (*zaprosy zhivosti i iarkosti*)). On the other, he should not allow poetry to be overwhelmed by its contents and the context of its origin, the "injustice," the "tragic (*neshutochnaia*) fate," and the "severe school of life" (*surovaia shkola zhizni*), which happened to be Shalamov's lot.[25] In these characteristically euphemistic expressions, Pasternak appears to be saying that suffering alone cannot make one into a poet, just as the rule of injustice does not automatically make one a just person; therefore, rejecting the inhuman time one has endured as morally unjust is still not enough in itself for one to count as a human being.[26]

In expressing himself so evasively, Pasternak was in fact trying to convince Shalamov not to use his trauma as a source of poetic inspiration. Even though he appears to have checked himself at the end of his long letter and even almost withdrawn his criticism, this was still a cruel lesson for Shalamov to learn. "And why should I spare you?"[27] Pasternak was asking (probably himself). In a roundabout way, he was telling Shalamov to come to terms with the lawless law of the taiga, with those atrocities that constituted everyday experience in Kolyma and that he sought to depict—and yet never succumb to literary narcissism in depicting the victimhood of injustice. To this criticism Shalamov responded: "However grandiose another poet's force might be, it will never force me into silence."[28] Gradually, Shalamov would purge all literariness from other peoples' and his own writing, including that inspired by Pasternak. Not much remained.

> I used to take a pencil and strike out in Babel's stories all of his beautiful ornaments, all those fires resembling resurrection, to see what was left. Something did remain of Babel, but of Larisa Reisner there remained absolutely nothing…
>
> Я когда-то брал карандаш и вычеркивал из рассказов Бабеля все его красоты, все эти пожары, похожие на воскресение, и смотрел, что же останется. От Бабеля оставалось немного, а от Ларисы Рейснер и совсем ничего не оставалось…[29]

25 Pasternak's letter, ibid., 7–13.

26 Ibid., 9.

27 Ibid.,13.

28 "И как бы ни была грандиозна сила другого поэта – она не заставит меня замолчать." *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 6, 16.

29 Ibid., 484.

What remained, though, was "[m]y own blood: this is what cemented phrases in *Kolyma Stories* … There exists not a single line, not a single phrase in *Kolyma Stories* that aims to be 'literary'."[30] Such was the theater of cruelty Shalamov first learned from Pasternak's letter. It does resonate, most likely without his knowledge, with his contemporaries in the European avant-garde. Antonin Artaud in the 1930s proclaimed a war on representation, "to put an end to the subjugation of the theater to the text," to achieve "expansion beyond words … for a dissociative and vibratory effect on our sensibilities" by inventing a new language of gestures "of sounds, cries, lights, onomatopoeia."[31] "In the state of degeneracy in which we live, it is through the skin that metaphysics will be made to enter our minds."[32] Cruelty is a medium against the prostitution of art: a thesis that resonates with Nietzsche's statement of the cruelty of mnemonics as well as Shalamov's understanding of the condition of humanity in the 20th -century *taiga*.

Unlike Artaud, Shalamov was not seeking metaphysics, but rather an ethical and political principle, a historical precision to be achieved by poetic truth. Here, again, his project resonates with post-war European modernism better than with his contemporary compatriots who were trying to adapt the experience of Soviet modernity to Russian 19th-century or Socialist Realist forms. Just like Shalamov, and at about the same time, the English painter Francis Bacon seemed to his audience to be a mad artist obsessed with violence, albeit more successful than Shalamov. In a series of interviews from the 1970s and 80s, Bacon's reflections on problems of art and the 20th-century human condition were gathered in a book with the telling title *The Brutality of Fact*. Here, Bacon's brutally direct, uncompromisingly truthful thinking strangely echoes Pasternak in his long and equivocal but simultaneously brutally cruel response to Shalamov's request for support.

Bacon recollected how violence had accompanied him since his early childhood, in various political contexts: first during World War I in London, then under the Sinn Fein movement in Ireland, then in the poverty and the dissoluteness of bohemian Berlin in 1927–28, and then in pre-war Paris. According to Bacon, he had been "accustomed to always living through forms of violence."[33] However, violence in his biography was something that only partially

30 "Собственная кровь – вот что сцементировали фразы 'КР.' Ни одной строки, ни одной фразы в 'КР', которая была бы 'литературной' – не существует." *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, 154.

31 Antonin Artaud, "The Theater of Cruelty (First Manifesto)," in idem, *Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag (New York: 1976), 242.

32 Ibid., 251.

33 David Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon* (New York: 1999), 80.

accounted for his artistic manner, for the deformation of reality in his pictures and, more generally, the violence of his painting which made him unique on the art scene, and which he himself acknowledged as violence. However, there was violence and violence. The impact of art was not at all the effect of the violence of what is represented; in principle, he held, "…the violence of paint … has nothing to do with the violence of war":

> When talking about the violence of paint, it's nothing to do with the violence of war. It's to do with an attempt to remake the violence of reality itself. … It's the violence also of the suggestions within the image itself, which can only be conveyed through paint. … We nearly always live through screens, a screened existence. And I sometimes think, when people say my work looks violent, that perhaps I have from time to time been able to clear away one or two of the veils or screens.[34]

Thus being "violent in paint," according to Bacon, means for the artist to apply violence against violence in reality, in order to "remake" the violence of reality. Painting removes the protective filters from the eyes of the audience: To use Merleau-Ponty's term, one could say that painting confronts the viewer in the flesh, thus eliminating the subject-object duality that actually produces those very filters of oblivion and indifference. The force of art affecting the audience does not derive from the dramatic intensity of the depicted situation, but from the strength of sensation in the viewer, from the force of affective reaction when one is confronted with artistic transformation, or deformation, in the artwork (and not with the horror of the represented situation). Bacon's second principle concerned specifically this: "to paint the scream and not the horror."[35] "Horror" is the moment of atrocity in reality; but the "scream" is the event of art addressing the viewer's sensation and thus re-constituting the horror of atrocity as a fact of art. Art is an alternative force potentially resistant to the hatred and anger of organized violence in life and it is concentrated in the sensation of the viewer responding to "the violence of paint"—and not in the situation of external reality painted on the canvas.

Shalamov himself was inspired not only by literary authors but also by the experience of painters. It appeared to him as if they shared his hatred of halftones and half-truths:

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34 Ibid., 81–82.

35 Ibid., 48. Bacon's formula referred to his *Study after Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (1953), in which the Pope was depicted with his face veiled and screaming with horror, the cause of which remains invisible.

> An important aspect in *Kolyma Stories* was prompted by artists. Gauguin in *Noah-Noah* writes: If you think the tree is green, take the best green color and paint. You will not be mistaken. You have found it. You have made up your mind. This is about the purity of tones. In the case of prose, this problem can be solved by eliminating everything superfluous in descriptions … and by cutting off the chaff of "half-tones" in the depiction of psychology.
>
> Важная сторона дела в "КР" подсказана художниками. Гоген в "Ноа-Ноа" пишет: если дерево кажется вам зеленым – берите самую лучшую зеленую краску и рисуйте. Вы не ошибетесь. Вы нашли. Вы решили. Речь здесь идет о чистоте тонов. Применительно к прозе этот вопрос решается в устранении всего лишнего не только в описаниях … но и в отсечении всей шелухи "полутонов" – в изображении психологии.[36]

It is likely that Bacon's is a position to which Shalamov could also subscribe. He does not speak about the violence of form as directly, but characteristically, when discussing the aesthetics and politics of writing, he uses the words *preodolenie* and *preodolet'* (to overcome or overpower, c.f. Russ. synonym *peresilit'* from *sila*, force or strength, i.e., to achieve something by using force against another force, by applying violence against violence). In writing, the author "overpowers" (*preodolevaet*) his material: the evil of the world, the absolutely negative experience of the camp. *Preodolenie zla*—the overpowering of evil, the practice of writerly violence against the evil of the represented—is absolutely essential in his work:

> In *Kolyma Stories*, there is nothing that is not intended to be the overpowering of evil, and the triumph of good—if one considers this question on a larger plane, on the plane of art. If I had a different aim, I would have found a completely different tonality and different colors, to pursue the same artistic principle.
>
> В "КР" нет ничего, что не было бы преодолением зла, торжеством добра, – если брать вопрос в большом плане, в плане искусства. Если бы я имел иную цель, я бы нашел совсем другой тон, другие краски, при том же самом художественном принципе.[37]

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36 Shalamov, "O proze," *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, 152.

37 Ibid., 148.

5 Slapping Metaphysics in the Face

In his reading of Bacon's interviews, Gilles Deleuze explained the philosophical implications of his practice of using artistic expression to overpower the effects of atrocities in real life in the sensation of the viewer/reader. Bacon's intention was "remaking the violence of reality" by applying to it another kind of violence of an entirely different nature: the violence of artistic intervention. This, Deleuze tells us, transforms the subject-object relation and therefore effectively eradicates metaphysics from the concept of art. This revolution is achieved by situating the source of thought in sensation. Thinking arises in a tactile relation to the world, in its conceptualization by means of haptic conception.[38] The eye of the viewer does not contemplate the image but touches the painting as if with a hand, and the painting "… acts directly upon the nervous system [and not] through the intermediary of the brain." In, or through, sensation, two events synthesize at the same time in the same body, the becoming and the happening:

> … at one and the same time, I *become* in the sensation and something *happens* through the sensation … And at the limit, it is the same body that, being the subject and the object, gives and receives the sensation. … Sensation is what is painted. What is painted on the canvas is the body not insofar as it is represented as an object, but insofar as it is experienced as sustaining this sensation.[39]

This double-directed effect—the becoming of the subject and the happening of something in the object—is also relevant in the case of Shalamov's *preodolenie*: For instance, in writing a novella, the first draft is important because it marks the writer's victory, something significant happening in the world and changing the writer. Deleuze continues: the sensation—and not the situation out there—is what the painter paints. This is how he creates facts by allowing nature to show itself in its facticity, or, to quote D. H. Lawrence on Cézanne, for the apple to reveal its "appleyness," i.e., its truth.[40] This is strikingly reminiscent of Viktor Shklovsky's famous formula in "Art as Technique" (Iskusstvo kak priem), the manifesto of the OPOIAZ with its futurist poetics, calling on

38 Here, I disregard the difference between the tactile and the haptic, as well as between these two and the manual and the digital as discussed by Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (New York: 2003), 154–161.

39 Ibid., 34–35.

40 Ibid.

new art to mobilize the senses in tactility to restore things in their material existence: making the stone stony.[41] Shklovsky's early program resonated just as strongly with European interwar and postwar modernism as it informed the agenda of Shalamov's second generation of the Russian avant-garde with their lived experience of war and terror.

"What is it you are concerned with besides appearances?" the interviewer asks Bacon, meaning: What remains of the truth of painting if one subtracts representation? "... My kind of—I'm putting it in a very pleasant way—exhilarated despair," Bacon replies.[42] In a strange kind of triple enfoldment—in the discourse of Deleuze's reflection on Bacon's interviews in which he focuses on violence in form and content—we can also discern a weak echo of Pasternak's voice trying to warn the younger poet against the dangers of succumbing to artistic narcissism and/or surrendering poetry to victimhood. Or, as Deleuze formulates a similar dilemma of double violence—in life and in painting—the effect of Bacon's strategy is that his art transforms "cerebral pessimism" into "nervous optimism":

> Abjection becomes splendor, the horror of life becomes a very pure and very intense life. "Life is frightening," said Cézanne, but in this cry he had already given voice to all the joys of line and color. Painting transmutes the cerebral pessimism into nervous optimism.[43]

The artist works to overcome the resistance of the representational in his own work—those very "screens," those clichés that oblivion erects against history. Looking at a picture representing a person screaming with horror, the observer is affected by the painting of the scream, and not by the direct impact of the horrific reality that caused the violent reaction. This is what constitutes art: its ability to let the invisible horror become a fact by depicting the horror on the face of someone who is horrified.

> ... If a thing comes across directly, people feel that that is horrific ... you could say that a scream is a horrific image; in fact, I wanted to paint the

41 "And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known." Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln, NE: 2012), 12.

42 Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact*, 83.

43 Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 61.

> scream more than the horror. I think, if I had really thought about what causes somebody to scream, it would have made the scream that I tried to paint more successful. Because I should in a sense have been more conscious of the horror that produced the scream.[44]

The principle of balance and equal power between force in nature and force in writing—central for the understanding of language as tactility—is examined in Shalamov's story "Cherry Brandy." Although considered to be a fantasy about the death of Mandelstam, this story was based on Shalamov's own near-death experience in hospital, in the terminal stages of starvation. The story occupies the central space in the sequence of narratives from the *Kolyma Stories* collection, thus representing a point of crisis, a bifurcation in the narrative of life and death. At this either/or moment, life initially leaves the dying poet, to return for an instant in all its richness before leaving him altogether. He realizes then that great equality between the two elements, the two equally powerful forces: bread and language. Returning for just an instant, life explodes with poetry:

> Life entered unasked, like a self-confident lady of the house. He had not invited her, but it still came into his body, his brain, coming like verses, like inspiration. And the meaning of that word 'inspiration' was for the first time revealed to him in its full sense. Verses were the life-giving force keeping him alive. That was it. He did not live for poetry, he lived by it. … [S]tanzas arose easily, one after the other, … the words still came without effort in a rhythm that was predetermined and, on every occasion, unusual … Each word was part of the world, it responded to rhyme, and the whole world rushed past with the speed of some electronic machine. Everything cried out, 'Take me!' No, me!"[45]

> Жизнь входила сама как самовластная хозяйка: он не звал ее, и все же она входила в его тело, в его мозг, входила, как стихи, как вдохновение. И значение этого слова впервые открылось ему во всей полноте. Стихи были той животворящей силой, которой он жил. Именно так. Он не жил ради стихов, он жил стихами. … Строфы и сейчас легко вставали, одна за другой, … слова легко вставали в каком-то заданном и каждый раз необычайном ритме. …Каждое слово было частью мира, оно откликалось на рифму, и весь мир

44 Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact*, 48.

45 Shalamov, "Cherry Brandy," in *Kolyma Stories*, 71–72.

> проносился с быстротой какой-нибудь электронной машины. Все кричало: возьми меня. Нет, меня.[46]

A bit of bread, his last supper, returns him to life again, for the very last time—he dies the same day, but before he dies, he bites at the bread with the same intensity of inspiration with which a little earlier the poetic stanzas were biting into him, fragments of absolute poetry: selfless, eternal, and remaining forever unwritten. Just as poetry gave him back his life, so this last piece of bread grants him the clear and distinct knowledge of death:

> He bit the bread with his scurvy-ridden teeth; his gums began to bleed and his teeth rocked but he felt no pain. He pressed the bread to his mouth with all his strength, sucking, tearing, and gnawing it …
> His neighbors tried to stop him.
> "Don't eat it all, it's better to eat it later, later…"
> And the poet understood. He opened his eyes wide, his fingers not letting go of the bloodstained bread.
> "What do you mean, later?" he pronounced precisely and clearly. Then he closed his eyes.
> By evening he was dead.[47]

> Он кусал хлеб цинготными зубами, десны кровоточили, зубы шатались, но он не чувствовал боли. Изо всех сил он прижимал ко рту, запихивал в рот хлеб, сосал его, рвал и грыз … Его останавливали соседи.
> – Не ешь все, лучше потом съешь, потом …
> И поэт понял. Он широко раскрыл глаза, не выпуская окровавленного хлеба из грязных синеватых пальцев.
> – Когда потом? – отчетливо и ясно выговорил он.
> И закрыл глаза.
> К вечеру он умер.[48]

Only death from hunger and not any other kind of death—for example in surgery or from an infection—allows the dying man to experience the supreme power of language as equal to the power of bread, to give life or to take it away,

46 Shalamov, "Sherri-bendi," in *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, 103.
47 Shalamov, "Cherry Brandy," 73–74.
48 Shalamov, "Sherri-brendi," 105.

the forces of language and food in "… that great equality between the prison bread ration and high poetry, that great indifference and calm that is given by death from hunger…"[49] The dystrophic poet's death in the hospital barracks marks the limit of all art and poetry and at the same time the last threshold to step over—*preodolet'*—towards inexistence.

6 The Message of the Larch Tree

"The writer's own blood, his own fate—this is what literature demands today … the writer writes with his own blood."[50] The consubstantiality of things, bodies, and words is indeed the principle of the writer's work and the only instance that guarantees the truth of the literary work as document, the incorruptibility of such a document: It documents without license from an external authority, without an institutional inscription. Such is the larch tree, the totem of Kolyma, and "the tree of concentration camps."[51]

A twig sent to a widow in Moscow from Kolyma, the place of the anonymous common grave where her husband lies frozen into the permafrost, is a messenger from the dead conveying its message by its smell. When it opens its leaves in a jar of water, Kolyma itself appears to be physically present, the elements of its nature mixing with the air of a Moscow kitchen. The message that the larch twig brings is not signification nor representation, but the facticity itself of the reality in which the man lived and died: there arises between the woman and the twig a flesh-to-flesh contact, a common sensibility between the subject and the object that "makes a fact be a fact," "makes the fact have meaning."[52] For Shalamov, the younger representative of the early Soviet literature of fact and the pupil of Sergei Tretiakov and Viktor Shklovsky, this mode of tactility becomes a writerly tactic, a *sine qua non* of artistic expression.

Larch is long-lived and weathers the fierce Kolyma climate better than any other species, and far better than the human. If you make a notch in it and write something on its wood with a pencil, it will preserve the mark for a long time, and help in orientation around the forest. Larch belongs equally to

49 "…то великое равноправие хлебной пайки и высокой поэзии, великое равнодушие и спокойствие, которое дает смерть от голода…" Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, 150.

50 "Собственная кровь, собственная судьба – вот требование сегодняшней литературы. … писатель пишет своей кровью," Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, 146.

51 Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, 279.

52 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 139–140.

the worlds of the living and the dead, of organic and inorganic matter. From the larch, the writer learns how to find courage not to tell about evil but to create a memory of its *preodolenie*. A dead twig of living nature, when put into Moscow's aseptic, poisonous, dead water the larch comes back to life and starts spreading around itself its specific scent and taste. It is the only agent in the universe of Kolyma that is capable of expressing something, of communicating itself. Kolyma's birds do not sing, its summers are cold and lifeless, and its flowers blossom without scent …

> … only the larch fills the forest with its elusive smell of turpentine. At first it seems like the smell of decay, the smell of the dead. But if you look and inhale this smell more deeply, you will understand it is the smell of life, the smell of resistance to the North, the smell of victory.[53]

In his poem *On the Nature of Things*,[54] Lucretius compared the evolution of the universe to the writing of poetry. Just as a poem comes forth gradually, letters added onto letters, word after word and verse after verse, so also the world evolves, its elements attracting other elements, atoms joining together one after another, particle after particle, to produce matter. [55]

Being a true poet and therefore possessing, as Lucretius did, an intimate knowledge about the nature of things, Shalamov must also have understood very well how close, if not identical, those two instances were to each other: the element of nature (*stikhiia*) and the element of poetic creation (*stikhotvorenie*).

Life touches upon poetry cruelly and forcefully, making the poet write in physical agony: "… I always talk to myself when I am writing. I shout, threaten, and weep. And I cannot stop the tears. Only after I finish the story or part of the story do I dry the tears."[56] Poetry in its turn touches upon life with

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53 Shalamov, "Voskreshenie listvennitsy" [The Revival of the Larch], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, 279. Translation by Sarah Young, http://www.stosvet.net/12/shalamov/index3.html.

54 Titus Lucretius Carus, *De rerum natura*, trans W. H. D. Rouse, introd., notes, and index Martin Ferguson Smith, vol. 1 (Harvard: 1975).

55 S*tikhi* (verses) and *stikhiia* (natural element) are etymologically related. The original meaning of Ancient Greek *stoicheion* is "a letter of the alphabet;" the meaning of pl. *stoicheia* as "natural elements," also, Lat. *elementa*, is the result of etymological derivation. Timothy J. Crowley, "On the Use of *Stoicheion* in the Sense of 'Element," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 29 (2005), 367–394.

56 "…я всегда говорю сам с собой, когда пишу. Кричу, угрожаю, плачу. И слез мне не остановить. Только после, кончая рассказ или часть рассказа, я утираю слезы." Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 6, 495–496.

images. Meaning arises when the flesh of the world rubs upon the flesh of language. Poetry is generated in a space of close contacts, attractions, repulsions, and other violent and painful encounters, in a theater of pure violence, where cruelty (according to Artaud, the force that liberates from prostitution) has achieved maximum intensity. A poetic work written from the inside of such a world is at risk of being fully possessed and colonized by the infernal, sadistic violence of what is being represented. This is what Pasternak intuitively sensed when he first read Shalamov's poems.

Such a tactile mode makes documents out of belles-lettres, in Shalamov's specific meaning of documentality: an instance that is capable of capturing and communicating, in a literary *work* rather than in an *object* of art, the truth that is emanated—communicated—expressed—in the event itself. What Shalamov defined as "new prose" was a new kind of writing activity that sought truth by critically reflecting on its own form. Together with Lucretius, Shalamov could have said that form functions as a simulacrum: An object out there creates a thin envelope of atoms around itself, a film that preserves the form and materiality of the original even when it settles upon the sense organs of the observer. This is how we see, hear, smell, or feel by touch: by partaking of the materiality, sensation being literally in-formed by the material composition and form of the object. One could further assume, with Lucretius, a similar process of making sense: the thin materiality of simulacra flying around and settling down onto the senses of a human being writing or reading. One has only to presuppose a relation of material consubstantiality between the world and the writing, the writing hand and the reading eye.

However, the twig from the larch tree is not in any sense an olive branch; its message is not of peace and forgiveness, not a sign of the covenant, but an omen. Shalamov's longer verse from 1954, *Atomnaia poema* (An Atomic Poem), offers an apocalyptic vision of a cosmic explosion of all matter, the end of the world resulting from the splitting of its indestructible and indivisible elements, its very principles; this Judgment is final, it is an act of fission without fusion. It puts an end to the pact of consubstantiality, that last link—already far beyond the limits of representation—between nature and humankind; between matter and memory; between the *stoicheion* of God's creation and those of poetry. This solidarity explodes when human beings learn how to split the atom, the indivisible element of being, the beginning, the origin, and the principle of both nature and literature. The time is past "when flattery was not honored, dignity was not trampled upon, and the atom was not split."[57]

57 "Когда не чествовалась лесть / И не растаптывалась честь, / Не расщеплялся атом." Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, 57.

Now the world reveals its core consisting of "enchanted dynamite," a potential explosion in its very essence. Splitting the principles means turning the world inside out, when all creation—a leaf, a rose petal, a cloud, a mineral, the earth, stars, and planets—everything that humankind calls "matter"—becomes "material" for extermination, and hypocritical nature stops acting friendly and turns on humanity a face that is malicious and treacherous.[58]

Despite all this, when placed in the dead water from Moscow's water-supply system, the larch twig still demonstrates the will to resurrection, and "the six hundred years of the life of the larch tree is the practical immortality of man."[59] This potential of "practical immortality" is also preserved in the language of the larch, its tactile expression:

> ...the people of Moscow will touch this rough, unpretentious and hard twig with their hands, they will look at its brilliant green needles, ... they will inhale its smell—not as a memory about the past but as living life.
>
> ... люди Москвы будут трогать руками эту шершавую, неприхотливую жесткую ветку, будут глядеть на ее ослепительно зеленую хвою, ее возрождение, воскрешение, будут вдыхать ее запах – не как память о прошлом, но как живую жизнь.[60]

How to make memory out of those instances of sensation—the touch, the sight, the smell—produced by matter of which it cannot be known if it is animate or inanimate, dead or living? How can it communicate resistance and victory while at the same time smelling of decay, and a will to resurrection while in actual reality carrying a message of doom? The smell of the larch spreads its message from Kolyma by sharing its materiality, by emitting part of its substance into the air. Thus, the twig is speechless but not languageless. History is not written and not narrated, but dissolved in the air men breathe. It remains to be hoped—as weak as such hope may be—that a memory made

58 "Мы лишь теперь понять могли / Все лицемерие земли, / Коварство минерала. // И облака, и чернозем, / Что мы материей зовем, / Все стало матерьялом // Убийства, крови и угроз, ... Мир в существе своем хранит / Завороженный динамит, // В цветах таится злоба, ... И содрогнется шар земной, /И будет тесно под луной, / И задрожит сейсмолог. // К виску приблизит пистолет, / И Новый грохнется Завет / На землю с книжных полок." Ibid., 57–58.

59 "Шестьсот лет жизни лиственницы – это практическое бессмертие человека." *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, 280.

60 Ibid.

in this way would not be corrupted, prostituted, or twisted; and that it could evade institutionalization because it does not use inscriptions. By means of the olfactory message of the larch, the materiality of Kolyma penetrates and merges with the air of Moscow. Having had to witness the horrors of history, nature goes mute but nevertheless has the power of expressing what remains beyond the power of words and images. And this is what literature also does: Not thanks to, but in spite of, their verbal medium, both prose and poetry communicate, as the larch does, in a thing-ly manner: not by signifying but by touching; not by registering events but by partaking of their reality. When they simply tell stories, they do not act by sharing information, but effectively create, build up, and reinforce the process of remembrance involving the whole body, the whole being of the one who remembers.

Thus, like the hand that slaps the scoundrel in the face and leaves an imprint on his cheek, so do words not merely reflect things (and least of all in the meaning of reflection as defined in Marxist-Leninist aesthetics). "Art is life and not a reflection of life."[61] Seen as a factor of tactility, language releases its hidden energy as a physical force—not as a symbol *inserting* itself *instead of*, but *intervening in*, life—powerfully, like a material force. Memory lies in front of the writer, whose business is not to describe its available content—there is no content, memory has covered it all up and concealed it—but to plow through the thickness of oblivion as if through a field of deep snow, "to trample down the clean virgin snow which has not yet felt the foot of man," in order to lay down a passage.[62] Similarly, the whiteness of an untouched sheet of paper is a vast, uninhabited surface of cold and white emptiness, lying there and waiting for language to trample a road across its deathly expanse, to open a passage through its nothingness.

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61 "Искусство – это жизнь, но не отражение жизни." *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, 271.

62 Varlam Shalamov, "Through the Snow," trans. *Robert Chandler and Nathan Wilkinson, in Russian Short Stories from Pushkin to Buida* (Penguin Books: 2007), accessed February 21, 2018, https://shalamov.ru/en/library/34/2.html.

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PART 3

History and Narrative

∴

CHAPTER 8

Counterfactuals and History in *The Gulag Archipelago*

Irina Karlsohn

1 Introduction

> The Hegelian consciousness, which lies almost imperceptibly at the very root of our thoughts, has inculcated in us a piety towards factual reality and engenders a contemptuous relationship towards unactualized potentiality, which did not make it to the realm of reality. … It is possible, however, to visualize another point of view, according to which it is precisely those "lost" pathways that represent one of the most agitating problems for the historian-philosopher.
>
> JURI LOTMAN[1]

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was not a historian-philosopher, but he was an artist who twice in his life played a historian's role. He first took on the task of writing the story of the Gulag, and then of creating his colossal multi-volume novel *The Red Wheel* on the causes of the Russian Revolution. Solzhenitsyn saw these tasks as complementary.[2] As Andrew Wachtel has astutely noted "As a result, in his work invention is consistently given the shape of a non-fiction narrative while history is consistently transformed into a work of fiction."[3]

Were those "lost paths of history" that Lotman mentions an issue that occupied Solzhenitsyn? Those familiar with the narrative of *The Red Wheel* would confidently reply in the affirmative. Particularly well-known among scholars is the retrospective section from the first part of the tetralogy, *August 1914*,

1 Juri Lotman, *Culture and Explosion*, trans. Wilma Clark (Berlin/New York: 2009), 58–59.

2 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "Interv'iu s Bernarom Pivo dlia frantsuzskogo televideniia" [Interview with Bernard Pivot for French Television], 175, in idem, *Publitsistika v trekh tomakh* [Essays in Three Volumes], vol. 3 (Yaroslavl': 1997).

3 Andriu Vakhtel [Andrew Wachtel], "Razdvigaia granitsy prostranstva i vremeni: Andrich, Solzhenitsyn i problema istorizma" [Expanding the Boundaries of Space and Time: Andrić, Solzhenitsyn and the Problem of Historicism], in *Zhizn' i tvorchestvo Aleksandra Solzhenitsyna: Na puti k "Krasnomu Kolesu"* [Life and Works of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Towards "The Red Wheel"], ed. Liudmila Saraskina (Moscow: 2013), 247.

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devoted to Prime Minister Petr Stolypin. Here Solzhenitsyn shows the kind of country Russia could have become, had it not been for the assassination of Stolypin.[4] While working on *The Red Wheel* in 1980–1983, Solzhenitsyn systematized his views on the historical period in question in his *Razmyshleniia nad Fevral'skoi revoliutsiei* (Reflections on the February Revolution). At the start of these *Reflections* we find the following methodological comment:

> The contemplation of historical alternatives could occasionally allow us to grasp better the essence of what has happened. Artists could have tried at the forks of history, with a degree of persuasion open to them, to follow the paths that were not chosen by history, thus deepening our understanding of the events by a narrative with an alternate plot. But the scholars banned us from using the conditional in our stories of the past …[5]

Solzhenitsyn's view on the usefulness of examining historical alternatives hardly diverges from that of Lotman. Solzhenitsyn's conclusion to the quote—"But the scholars banned us from using the conditional in our stories of the past"—might appear to mean that he does not dispute the ban enforced by professional historians, and avoids using the conditional. However, for that specific article the opposite is true: Solzhenitsyn combines the tasks of artist and scholar, and, instead of steering clear of "alternate plots," employs them regularly.[6] The same can be seen in *The Red Wheel*. The idea of inserting chapters on Stolypin—thereby exceeding the chronological limits set by the title of the first novel in the cycle—apparently results from the author's aspirations of showing the unfulfilled future of Russia. Moreover, the very genre

4 In his review of the English translation of *March 1917*, the third node in *The Red Wheel*, Morson characterized the section devoted to Stolypin as "an exercise in counterfactual history" (Gary Saul Morson, "Solzhenitsyn's Cathedrals. On the literary works of Russian author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn," *The New Criterion*, October 2017).

5 Trans. Nikita Mikhaylov. "Рассмотрение исторических вариантов иногда позволяло бы нам лучше охватить смысл происшедшего. Художники могли бы пытаться в развилках истории, с мерой доступной им убедительности, продвигаться также и по тропам, не выбранным историей, углубляя наше понимание событий повествованием с вариантным сюжетом. Но ученые запретили нам conditionalis в рассказах о прошлом …" Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "Razmyshleniia nad Fevral'skoi revoliutsiei" [Reflections on the February Revolution], *Publitsistika v trekh tomakh*, vol. 1, 458.

6 The same observation is made by Aleksei Klimov: "Kolebania vektora istorii v 'Krasnom Kolese'" [Fluctuations of the Vector of History in *The Red Wheel*], in *Zhizn' i tvorchestvo Aleksandra Solzhenitsyna*, 77.

of *The Red Wheel* as defined by Solzhenitsyn himself ("*A Narrative in Discrete Periods of Time*") is directly connected to his attempt to consider the unchosen pathways of history. Underlying the narrative construction of this work is the idea that certain critical points in history represent bundles of different historical possibilities. All the events depicted in the novel are divided into such nodes (*uzly*),[7] which carry the main compositional function. The "node" is a concept borrowed by Solzhenitsyn from mathematics and also used in structuralism;[8] the novel contains four such nodes, each devoted to the key historical moments that culminated in the 1917 Revolution, with each in turn fragmented into even shorter periods of time—key days and hours. Although the initial plan included twenty nodes, the narration ends with the fourth node in mid-May of 1917, mainly because of Solzhenitsyn's conviction that the events of April 1917 predetermined what happened in October.[9] On the other hand, such an explanation contracts Solzhenitsyn's own concept of history, according to which every implemented solution and every chosen path is surrounded by numerous missed chances.

How universal is Solzhenitsyn's principle of employing those nodes? and how are they connected to the use of counterfactuals? Does this principle apply also in the second of his "two great cathedrals," *The Gulag Archipelago*?[10] Does Solzhenitsyn construct the narrative of the *Archipelago* according to the nodes principle, and does the alternative counterfactual history play any part here?

Scholars have repeatedly noted that these two major historical works by Solzhenitsyn are closely connected. Gary Sual Morson has pointed out that

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7 In the recent translation of *March 1917* into English and "in accordance with the wishes of the Solzhenitsyn estate," the translator chose the term "node" (not "knot") to translate the term *uzel*. See "Publisher's Note," in Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *March 1917: The Red Wheel, Node III, Book I*, trans. Marian Schwartz (Notre Dame, IN: 2017), accessed September 4, 2018, https://www3.nd.edu/~undpress/tocs/P03388-toc.pdf. The choice of "node" has the advantage of clearly showing the meaning of the term. I use "node" here for the same reason.

8 Solzhenitsyn has explained in detail what he means by "nodes" and how the whole narrative is organized. See Solzhenitsyn, "Interv'iu s Bernarom Pivo," 173. Cf.: Zhorzh Niva [George Nivat], *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Borets i pisatel'* [Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. A Champion and a Writer] (St. Petersburg: 2014), 113.

9 Solzhenitsyn, "Na obryve povestvovaniia. Konspekt nenapisannykh uzlov" [At the Narration's Precipice. The Outline of Unwritten Nodes], in idem., *Krasnoe koleso. Uzel 4. Aprel' Semnadtsatogo. Kniga 2* (*Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 19), 419.

10 Gary Saul Morson, "Solzhenitsyn's Cathedrals." Cf. the similar characteristics of these two *magna opera* of Solzhenitsyn in Daniel J. Mahoney, "The Moral Witness of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn," *First Things*, October 2009, accessed June 20, 2018, https://www.firstthings.com/article/2009/10/the-moral-witness-of-aleksandr-solzhenitsyn.

these two texts are inextricably linked to each other: whereas *The Gulag Archipelago* is "the product of the Revolution," *The Red Wheel* is one single attempt to explain why there was a Revolution.[11] Andrew Wachtel has highlighted another central issue that links together these two texts: "How could Gulag happen?"[12] As the Revolution, in Solzhenitsyn's eyes, ended no sooner than did collectivization and the first Five-Year Plan, we could add that *The Gulag Archipelago* and *The Red Wheel* are in fact partly chronologically overlapping.[13]

Scholars have analyzed the genre characteristics of these two hybrid (in respect to their genre) works, as well as distinguishing characteristics of Solzhenitsyn's historical approach to the material. In her article "Chelovek v istorii: Solzhenitsyn i Ippolit Ten" (Man in History: Solzhenitsyn and Hippolyte Taine) Elena Balzamo offers an insightful and detailed analysis of Solzhenitsyn's view of historical process as expressed in *The Red Wheel*.[14] Balzamo reaches the convincing conclusion that history is "probabilistic" and "fluctuates constantly between the freedom of choice and the strictly predetermined course in people's actions."[15] However, as she observes, with every node that comprises the novel, liberty becomes more and more restricted. Further, comparing the chronological boundaries of *The Red Wheel* with those of *The Gulag Archipelago* and noting that Solzhenitsyn's chronicles of the Revolution merge smoothly into the chronicles of the Gulag, Balzamo makes the following remark, of key importance for the present chapter:

> In essence, this outline of unwritten nodes connects *The Red Wheel* with Solzhenitsyn's other historical work, which was written earlier—

11 Ibid.

12 Vakhtel [Wachtel], "Razdvigaia granitsy prostranstva i vremeni," 247.

13 With its chronology of five epilogs and the sketch of sixteen further nodes, *The Red Wheel* partly covers the historical period of *The Gulag Archipelago*. For detailed analysis of the epilogues and the sketch, see Andrei Nemzer, "I svet vo t'me svetit" [And the Light Shines in the Dark], in Solzhenitsyn, *Krasnoe Koleso. Uzel 4. Aprel' Semnadtsatogo. Kniga 2*, 557–567.

14 Elena Balzamo, "'...Vypolniat' svoi dolg. Na svoiem meste': Lichnost' i istoricheskii protsess v 'Krasnom Kolese'" ["... Fulfilling One's Duty. At One's Place": The Individual and History in *The Red Wheel*], in *Zhizn' i tvorchestvo Aleksandra Solzhenitsyna: Na puti k "Krasnomu Kolesu"* [Life and Works of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Towards "The Red Wheel"], ed. Liudmila Saraskina (Moscow: 2013), 28–39; Irina Karlsohn, "History and Modernity in the Works of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn," *Toronto Slavic Quarterly*, no. 54 (2015), 12–25.

15 Elena Balzamo, "Chelovek v istorii: Solzhenitsyn i Ippolit Ten," [Man in History: Solzhenitsyn and Hippolyte Taine], *Novyi mir*, no. 7 (1996), 195–211, accessed August 25, 2018, http://magazines.russ.ru/novyi_mi/1996/7/orlov1-pr.html.

> *The Gulag Archipelago*. … The *Archipelago*, unlike *The Red Wheel*, *shows time that is frozen*, time, in which there is *no place for potential historical opportunities for an individual*. Surely, Solzhenitsyn recognizes the evolution of the new regime in Russia but it is an evolution of forms, not of its essence. In the meantime, the essence is uniform throughout the seventy years—it is the regime of a concentration camp. Therefore, it is typical that the *Archipelago contains no "nodes"* [*uzly*]; diachronic analysis is inappropriate when studying the Soviet epoch as each day in a camp is too similar to another one and *history comes to a total halt*.[16]

Despite their partial chronological connection, Balzamo finds *The Gulag Archipelago* and *The Red Wheel* more distant than interlinked. There are many points of difference: the presence of a diachronic analysis in *The Red Wheel* and the lack thereof in *The Gulag Archipelago*; two distinct approaches to the historical analysis—a system of nodes in *The Red Wheel*, and a different principle implied in *The Gulag Archipelago*. Finally, Balzamo notes the divergence between Solzhenitsyn's views of these two historical periods and of the abilities of an individual to influence the course of history. All this, in essence, renders Solzhenitsyn's two major works, in Balzamo's view, radically different. If in *The Red Wheel* the historical concept presupposes the individual's opportunity to direct and change the course of history, in *The Gulag Archipelago* this opportunity is absent.

In the following, I propose a different perspective on these ideas, including the question of Solzhenitsyn's view of history when studied through the lens of *The Gulag Archipelago*. My point of departure is the observation that *The Gulag Archipelago* incorporates a significant number of counterfactual statements. As the use of counterfactuals is undoubtedly directly linked to the historiography of *The Gulag Archipelago*, I will touch on the question of Solzhenitsyn's usage of them and their purpose. Moreover, comparing *The Gulag Archipelago* against *The Red Wheel* provides an opportunity to understand the evolution of Solzhenitsyn's narrative technique as employed in these two works.

For this reason, my analysis is divided into three main sections. I begin with a brief account of how Solzhenitsyn understands history as stated in his own words, compared to how history appears in his literary texts. I then proceed to discuss the similarities between the Solzhenitsynian concept of history and that of Jury Lotman, seeking to show how the utilization of nodes of history

16 Ibid., trans. Nikita Mikhaylov, italics added.

and counterfactuals is connected to Solzhenitsyn's general view of history. Next, I introduce the concept of counterfactuals and analyze Solzhenitsyn's use of them through several illustrative examples, and asking when, how, and why Solzhenitsyn employs them. Finally, I offer some concluding reflections and remarks.

2 Solzhenitsyn's View on History

As not only a writer but also a historian, Solzhenitsyn could not help but develop in his two major works a personal view of the historical process, just as he could not avoid employing a specific methodology in the creation of his "artistic investigations." It was while working on *The Red Wheel* that Solzhenitsyn repeatedly expressed his overall view of history. This is clearly shown in his 1989 interview with David Aikman, in which he states: "[H]istory results from the interaction between the Divine will and the free will of individual humans … It is this interaction between them that gives us history. However, history is difficult to understand." The only thing we can acknowledge, in Solzhenitsyn's opinion, is "that life is organic and develops as a tree grows or a river flows. Every disruption to its course is harmful and unnatural. Revolution is such a disruption."[17]

This statement clearly indicates that Solzhenitsyn is an advocate of natural change and soft influence on history, not of radical breaks in it. He is also favorable to the idea of a steady and uninterrupted flow of historical development. A revolution for Solzhenitsyn is always a break in such a flow; therefore, he sees the Soviet period as a forced deviation from the true course of Russian history.[18] At the same time, the structure of *The Red Wheel* and the author's method of working with the historical material demonstrate that, while tracing the causes of the Revolution and presenting in retrospect the decade preceding World War I, Solzhenitsyn is groping for and constructing those nodes—the critical explosive points in Russian history of the early twentieth

17 Solzhenitsyn, "Interv'iu s Devidom Eikmanom dlia zhurnala 'Time'" [Interview with David Aikman for *Time* magazine], (May 23, 1989), *Publitsistika v trekh tomakh*, vol. 3, 325.

18 Solzhenitsyn's perception of the Soviet period as a deviation, a break in the country's natural course, is contingent on the two significant points here. The first is the justification of the very idea of a revolt, as clearly seen in the third volume of *The Gulag Archipelago*. The second is the theme of resistance, which runs throughout *The Gulag Archipelago*. In her chapter, Elena Mikhailik touches on Solzhenitsyn's view of the Soviet period, and analyzes reflections on it in *The Gulag Archipelago*.

century. Solzhenitsyn's methodology in *The Red Wheel* shows that his views on history are not limited to the statement quoted above. His historical concept presupposes not only an organic progress of the curve of history but also the mandatory presence of those turning points at which a critical event occurs or a choice takes place. These signify a radical turn in the flow of history, and determine future events and their trajectory. Solzhenitsyn scrolls through the "film" of Russian history in the early twentieth century, and in each of his volumes deals with the plethora of conditions and circumstances that could lead to diverse consequences. Each implemented section of the path is presented as surrounded (or he tries to surround it), with "a bundle of unrealized possibilities."[19]

Lotman describes a similar mechanism. Interestingly, both Solzhenitsyn and Lotman probably arrived at the idea of critical points and forks of history independently of each other. Solzhenitsyn drew on scientific concepts; in Lotman's case, on the ideas of the physical chemist and Nobel laureate Ilya Prigogine:

> Dynamic processes, which take course in equilibrium conditions, occur along determined curves. However, with distance from the entropic points of balance the movement reaches critical points, where the predictable flow of processes is interrupted. … Further development occurs as an implementation of one of equally probable alternatives. … This means that it is not only mechanism of randomness that comes into force in bifurcation points but also the mechanism of conscious choice. … At those moments, behaviour of specific people as well as of masses ceases to be automatically predictable, determination recedes into the background. Historical movement should be treated at those moments not as a trajectory but as a continuum, which is potentially capable of being resolved in a whole number of alternatives. Those nodes characterized by reduced predictability are moments of revolutions or other radical historical shifts. The choice of the path that is actually taken depends on a complex of random circumstances and, to a greater degree, on the very consciousness of *actants*.[20]

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19 "пучком нереализованных возможностей." Juri Lotman, "Iz'iavlenie Gospodne ili azartnaia igra? (Zakonomernoe i sluchainoe v istoricheskom protsesse)" [Lord's Testimony, or Gambling? (Regular and Random in a Historical Process)], in idem, *Istoriia i tipologiia russkoi kul'tury* [History and Typology of Russian Culture] (St. Petersburg: 2002), 345. This article was initially published in 1994 in *Iskusstvo kino*, no. 1, 126–132.

20 Trans. Nikita Mikhaylov. Cited from Lotman, "Iz'iavlenie Gospodne ili azartnaia igra?," 346–347.

This mechanism that Lotman describes in detail allows an understanding of the method that underlies *The Red Wheel* in terms of both composition and the methodology. Having said that, I admit that Solzhenitsyn himself never formulated it in such an elaborate and explicit manner: I hypothesize that the same mechanism formed the basis for *The Gulag Archipelago*. Let us now take a closer look at how Solzhenitsyn works when analyzing the historical metamorphosis of the Soviet period in *The Gulag Archipelago*. Among the devices he employs, an important role is played by counterfactual statements, which are directly linked to Solzhenitsyn's method of constructing critical points and missed paths in history.

3 Counterfactual History in *The Gulag Archipelago*

Counterfactual statements or reflections appear virtually everywhere in *The Gulag Archipelago*. In the quotation cited at the beginning of this chapter, in which Solzhenitsyn mentioned the ban on conditionals that scholars have enforced, he is probably not referring to any kind of conditionals, but first and foremost to a *counterfactual conditional*, which is indispensable for excursions into the realm of chances lost and prospects forsaken.

What is a counterfactual conditional? It is a statement, expressed in the subjunctive mood with a conjunction "if," in the form of "If Lenin had not returned to Russia in April 1917, the Bolsheviks would not have seized power in October." The antecedent "Lenin had not returned to Russia in April 1917" shows direct contrast with reality. It runs counter to the facts and presages the un-truth of the consequent "The Bolsheviks would not have seized the power in October." As Johannes Bulhof states, "It has been long recognized that counterfactuals are modal in character."[21] Moreover, counterfactuals describe not only a certain opportunity or an alternative, but also what might have arisen from such an opportunity, if….. "If that possibility had been actual, then other facts about the world would be different as well," notes Bulhof.[22] Thus, a counterfactual allows the revision of the past in order to clarify its meaning for the present and for the future.

As *The Gulag Archipelago* is not simply a story of the Gulag but also of those held there, as well as the story of Solzhenitsyn himself, these three different

21 Johannes Bulhof, "What if? Modality and history," *History and Theory* 38, no. 2 (May 1999), 146.

22 Ibid., 146.

plot lines constitute major narratives, unfolding in parallel, constantly intertwining and intersecting.[23] The story of the arrest technique, which opens the *Archipelago*, is an exposition whose central point is that *anyone* can become a victim.[24] The author happens to become that "anyone."

Therefore, it makes sense to distinguish between the two types of counterfactual constellations and the two different historical curves of Solzhenitsyn: the curve of history for specific individuals, as opposed to the curve of the country's history, of its system of concentration camps and Soviet society. Scholars have noted that in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, on the level of the histories and fates of specific characters, Solzhenitsyn shows not only those events and choices that actually take place, but also indicates a whole range of things that might have occurred but never did.[25] In *The Gulag Archipelago*, Solzhenitsyn significantly elucidates this range, not only exploring the forks in individual fates, but also constructing the nodes of the whole country's history. How do the counterfactual statements work in this complex text? Let us consider some examples.

Counterfactual statements accompany the plotline of the "correctional education" of an individual caught up in the Gulag system. In the "Arrest," the opening chapter of *The Gulag Archipelago*, we find the first example of Solzhenitsyn's usage of this device:

> And how we burned in the camps later, thinking: What would things have been like if every Security operative, when he went out at night to make an arrest, had been uncertain whether he would return alive and had to say good-bye to his family? Or if, during periods of mass arrests… people had not simply sat there in their lairs, paling with terror at every bang of the down-stairs door and at every step on the staircase, but had understood they had nothing left to lose and had boldly set up in the downstairs hall an ambush of half a dozen people with axes, hammers,

23 See Mikhail Geller, *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. K 70-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia* [Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. On the 70th Anniversary of his Birth] (London: 1989), 16.

24 Andrei Ranchin, "'Arkhipelag GULag' A. I. Solzhenitsyna kak khudozhestvennyi tekst: nekotorye nabliudeniia" [A. I. Solzhenitsyn's "Gulag Archipelago" as a Literary Text: Some Observations], accessed June 5, 2018, https://www.portal-slovo.ru/philology/40042.php.

25 See chapter by Leona Toker in this volume. See also Leona Toker, *Return from the Archipelago: Narratives of Gulag Survivors* (Bloomington, IN: 2000), 193; Elena Mikhailik, "Kot, begushchii mezhdu Solzhenitsynym i Shalamovym" [The Cat that Runs between Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov], in idem, *Nezakonnaia kometa. Varlam Shalamov: opyt medlennogo chteniia* [Illegal Comet: Varlam Shalamov, an Exercise in Close Reading] (Moscow: 2018), 286–291.

> pokers, or whatever else was at hand? … The Organs would very quickly have suffered a shortage of officers and transport and, notwithstanding all of Stalin's thirst, the cursed machine would have ground to a halt![26]
>
> Как потом в лагерях жгло: а что, если бы каждый оперативник, идя ночью арестовывать, не был бы уверен, вернётся ли он живым, и прощался бы со своей семьёй? Если бы во времена массовых посадок, например в Ленинграде, когда сажали четверть города, люди бы не сидели по своим норкам, млея от ужаса при каждом хлопке парадной двери и шагах на лестнице, – а поняли бы, что терять им уже дальше нечего, и в своих передних бодро бы делали засады по несколько человек с топорами, молотками, кочергами, с чем придётся? … Органы быстро бы недосчитались сотрудников и подвижного состава, и, несмотря на всю жажду Сталина, – остановилась бы проклятая машина![27]

Already here it is evident that the alternative vision of an arrest indicated by Solzhenitsyn is closely tied to two crucial themes of the text—those of resistance and of freedom of choice. These two themes are highlighted in the book from the very beginning, developed by Solzhenitsyn in direct connection to the counterfactuals. Revealingly, he develops the theme of protest by searching for the alternatives in a person's behavior at the moment of arrest. Here he draws the same curve of history as he does later in *The Red Wheel*, although in *Gulag* only at the individual level. "An arrest consists of a series of incidental irrelevancies, of a multitude of things that do not matter, and there seems no point in arguing about any one of them individually … and yet all these incidental irrelevancies taken together implacably constitute the arrest," writes Solzhenitsyn as he demonstrates his vision of an arrest as an event that consists of several random occurrences that eventually become a part of a new regularity.[28]

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26 Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 1, 13, note 5. Italics in the original.

27 Solzhenitsyn, *Arkhipelag Gulag. Chasti I–II* [vol. 1], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 4, 31.

28 *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 1, 13. ("Арест состоит из мелких околичностей, многочисленных пустяков – и ни из-за какого в отдельности как будто нет смысла спорить …, а все-то вместе эти околичности неминуемо и складываются в арест." Solzhenitsyn, *Arkhipelag Gulag. Chasti I–II* [vol. 1], 31.) Cf. Lotman: "Random before the implementation it becomes determinate later on. *Retrospectivity strengthens determination*. For further movement, choice is the first link in a new regularity." Lotman, "Iz'iavlenie Gospodne ili azartnaia igra?," 347. Italics in the original.

Another opportunity that allows for resistance is that brief time-gap between apprehension and jail:

> And so they are *leading* you. During a daylight arrest there is always that brief and unique moment when they are *leading* you … through a crowd of hundreds of just such doomed innocents as yourself. You aren't gagged. You really can and you really ought to *cry out*—to *cry out* that you are being arrested! … That arrests are being made on the strength of false denunciations! That millions are being subjected to silent reprisals! If many such outcries had been heard all over the city in the course of the day, would not our fellow citizens perhaps have begun to bristle? And would arrests perhaps no longer have been so easy?[29]

> И вот – вас ведут. При дневном аресте обязательно есть этот короткий неповторимый момент, когда вас … *ведут* сквозь толпу между сотнями таких же невиновных и обречённых. И рот ваш не заткнут. И вам можно и непременно надо было бы *кричать*! Кричать, что вы арестованы! … что хватают по ложным доносам! что идёт глухая расправа над миллионами! И, слыша такие выкрики много раз на день и во всех частях города, может быть, сограждане наши ощетинились бы? может, аресты не стали бы так легки!?[30]

This example shows how Solzhenitsyn uses a counterfactual statement in order to stress what he considers an opportunity to demonstrate resistance that was present but not utilized. The very fact that the opportunity was lost explains, for Solzhenitsyn, the ease and the regularity of millions of arrests. In giving a detailed account of how a human is transformed from a potential inhabitant of Gulag into an actual one, of the psychological mechanisms, and of the variations in arrests, inquiries, prisoner transports, camps and exiles, Solzhenitsyn uses counterfactual alternatives. In this way, he discovers certain nodes in the history of each individual, where a different outcome, a different choice, was once available. In describing (his own) interrogation at the prosecutor's office, Solzhenitstyn states:

> He was required by law to ask what complaints I had about the conduct of the interrogation and whether coercion had been used or any violations of my legal rights had occurred. But it had been a long time since

29 Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 1, 15. Italics in the original.

30 Solzhenitsyn, *Arkhipelag Gulag. Chasti I–II* [vol. 1], 31. Italics and spacing in the original.

> prosecutors asked such questions. And what if they had? After all, the existence of that entire Ministry building with its thousands of rooms, and of all five thousand of the Ministry's other interrogation buildings, railroad cars, caves, and dugouts scattered throughout the Soviet Union, was based on violations of legal rights. And it certainly wasn't up to Lieutenant Colonel Kotov and me to reverse that whole process.[31]

> Он должен был бы спросить: какие у меня есть претензии к ходу следствия? не было ли попирания моей воли и нарушений законности? Но так давно уж не спрашивали прокуроры. А если бы и спросили? Весь этот тысячекомнатный дом министерства и пять тысяч его следственных корпусов, вагонов, пещер и землянок, разбросанных по всему Союзу, только и жили нарушением законности, и не нам с ним было бы это повернуть.[32]

This example illustrates how a counterfactual statement in *The Gulag Archipelago* does not necessarily show that in certain situations there actually existed the real prospect of a different choice for every individual. In the case of the prosecutor's interrogation, there does not appear to be a realistic prospect of the prosecutor changing anything. Quite the opposite, as it contradicts the rigidly predetermined outcome.

Solzhenitsyn seems to be playing with alternative scenarios in order to reach a conclusion to the question of whether such scenarios ever existed or were repeatedly restricted. In another chapter he describes escapes from special labor camps, offering detailed accounts of several of them, including those from Western Siberia in 1949—which ended, as did many others, with the recapture of the fugitive. In his detailed account of how one convict was dispatched back to the camp from the platform of a railway station in an isolated hamlet while the locals approached him trying to offer help, Solzhenitsyn reaches this conclusion:

> If it had been on a station platform in Moscow, Leningrad, or Kiev, or any other flourishing city, everybody would have passed by the grey-headed old man, kneeling and manacled, like a figure in a Repin picture, without noticing him or turning around to look—publishing executives, progressive film producers, lecturers on humanism, army officers, not to mention

31 Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 1, 140–141.

32 Solzhenitsyn, *Arkhipelag Gulag. Chasti I–II* [vol. 1], 137.

> trade union and Party officials. And all ordinary, undistinguished citizens occupying no position worth mentioning would also have tried to go by without noticing, in case the guard asked their names and made a note of them—because if you have a residence permit for Moscow, where the shops are so good, you must not take risks…[33]

> Если б это было на перроне Москвы, Ленинграда, Киева, любого благополучного города, – мимо этого коленопреклонённого скованного седого старика, как будто с картины Репина, все бы шли не замечая и не оборачиваясь, – и сотрудники литературных издательств, и передовые кинорежиссёры, и лекторы гуманизма, и армейские офицеры, уж не говорю о профсоюзных и партийных работниках. И все рядовые, ничем не выдающиеся, никаких постов не занимающие граждане тоже старались бы пройти не замечая, чтобы конвой не спросил и не записал их фамилии, – потому что у тебя ведь московская прописка, в Москве магазины хорошие, рисковать нельзя…[34]

But Solzhenitsyn does not settle for a simple statement of the lack of plausible alternative choices in large Soviet cities when it came to an escape and transporting the escapee back to the camp. Instead, he creates a counterfactual scenario for the escape situation in order to present his analysis of the causes of such lack of choice. Here, he brings to the foreground a recurrent theme in *The Gulag Archipelago:* that of common guilt and personal responsibility of every individual for each node in Russian history.

Another instance of the use of counterfactuals within the plotline of the correctional education of Soviet Man is again linked to the theme of personal choice and individual responsibility for it, on the one hand, and on the other, to that of the executioner and his victim, as well as of mutual reversibility of their roles:

> And just so we don't go around flaunting too proudly the white mantle of the just, let everyone ask himself: "If my life had turned out differently, might I myself not have become just such an executioner?" …
>
> Still, some of us were recruited at that time, and I think that if they had really put the pressure on, they could have broken everybody's resistance.

33 Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 3, 196–197.

34 Solzhenitsyn, *Arkhipelag Gulag*. *Chasti V–VII* [vol. 3], 176.

> So I would like to imagine: if, by the time war broke out, I had already been wearing an NKVD officer's insignia on my blue tabs, what would I have become? Nowadays, of course, I can console myself by saying that my heart wouldn't have stood it, that I would have objected and at some point slammed the door. But later, lying on a prison bunk, I began to look back over my actual career as an officer and I was horrified. …
>
> If Malyuta Skuratov had summoned *us*, we, too, probably would have done our work well![35]

> Чтобы белыми мантиями праведников не шибко переполаскивать, спросим себя каждый: а повернись моя жизнь иначе – палачом таким не стал бы и я? …
>
> Всё же кое-кто из нас завербовался тогда. Думаю, что если б очень крепко нажали – сломили б нас и всех. И вот я хочу вообразить: если бы к войне я был бы уже с кубарями в голубых петлицах – что́ б из меня вышло? Можно, конечно, теперь себя обласкивать, что моё ретивóе бы не стерпело, я бы там возражал, хлопнул дверью. Но, лёжа на тюремных нарах, стал я как-то переглядывать свой действительный офицерский путь – и ужаснулся. …
>
> А кликнул бы Малюта Скуратов *нас* – пожалуй, и мы б не сплошали!..[36]

In other words, a different stream of events could have easily turned his narrator, and many others who found themselves in that situation, into executioners. As the narrator constructs the counterfactual stream of his pre-war life and the possible node of his recruitment by the law enforcement bodies (which never materialized), he demonstrates the element of arbitrariness in the curve of an individual's history, thus showing both the instability and the reversibility of personal choice within the historical model of the *Archipelago*.

4 Nodes of Gulag History

All the examples cited above pertain to the plotline of the correctional education of a Soviet man. As *The Gulag Archipelago* consists of several connected but clearly separate parallel plots, I will cite several examples from the plotline

35 Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 1, 160, 161–162, 168. Italics in the original.
36 Solzhenitsyn, *Arkhipelag Gulag. Chasti I–II* [Vol. 1], 152, 154, 159. Italics in the original.

that deals with the country's history as a whole. In describing the "maturity" of the law (chapter "The Law Matures") and the Gulag's history, Solzhenitsyn depicts in detail the history of resistance during the Great Patriotic War, including the story of General Vlasov. Here I provide two examples of what form the alternative history of the Great Patriotic War takes, according to Solzhenitsyn. Firstly:

> On top of all this came a defeat without precedent in Russian memories, as vast rural areas stretching to the outskirts of both capitals and to the Volga, as many millions of peasants, slipped from under kolkhoz rule, and … it turned out that the republics only wanted independence, the village only wanted freedom from the kolkhoz! The workers freedom from feudal decrees! If the newcomers had not … conceived the obscene idea of turning Russia into a colony, the patriotic cause would not have devolved on those who had always tried to smother it, and we should hardly have been called upon to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Russian Communism.[37]

> А к тому же навалилось ещё невиданное на русской памяти поражение, и огромные деревенские пространства до обеих столиц и до Волги и многие мужицкие миллионы мгновенно выпали из-под колхозной власти, и … оказалось, что республики хотят только независимости! деревня – только свободы от колхозов! рабочие – свободы от крепостных Указов! И если бы пришельцы … не замысли ли бы такую гнусь, как обратить Россию в колонию, – то не воротилась бы национальная идея туда, где вечно душили её, и вряд ли пришлось бы нам праздновать двадцатипятилетие российского коммунизма.[38]

Secondly:

> The last few months were passing when millions of Soviet people remained out of Stalin's reach, when they still could take up arms to fight their Bolshevik prison, when they were still able to build their independent life. However, the Nazi authorities had no hesitations; it was on June 8, 1943, right before the Kursk-Orel battle when Hitler confirmed that an

37 Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 3, 26–27.
38 Solzhenitsyn, *Arkhipelag Gulag. Chasti V–VII* [vol. 3], 26.

> independent Russian army would never be created and Germany had no interest in Russians other than as a work force. It was unfathomable for Hitler that the only historical opportunity to overthrow the communist regime was by means of the people's movement, the upheaval of the jaded citizens. But this kind of Russia and this kind of victory was somewhat scarier for Hitler than any kind of defeat. And even after Stalingrad and the loss of the Caucasus Hitler noticed nothing new.[39]

> Шли последние месяцы, когда всё ещё миллионы советских людей оставались вне власти Сталина, ещё могли взять оружие против своей большевицкой неволи и способны были устроить свою независимую жизнь, – но германское руководство не испытывало колебаний: именно 8 июня 1943 года, перед Курско-Орловской битвой, Гитлер подтвердил, что русская независимая армия никогда не будет создана и русские нужны Германии только как рабочие. Гитлеру недоступно было, что единственная историческая возможность свергнуть коммунистический режим – движение самого населения, подъём измученного народа. *Такой* России и *такой* победы Гитлер боялся больше всякого поражения. И даже после Сталинграда и потеряв Кавказ, Гитлер не заметил ничего нового.[40]

In both examples, the historical situation described *could* have been resolved, according to Solzhenitsyn's counterfactual version, in a radically different way from how it actually developed. In both cases the outcome of the events described is connected to the decisions made by the Nazi leadership. However, while in the first example the counterfactual statement is explicit and plays part of the final link in the chain of the analyzed causes of the war's outcome, the second instance is remarkable for the implicit use of modality, of the subjunctive mood. The form "if only" is implied: *If only* the Nazi authorities had reached a different decision, *if only* the Russian army under Vlasov's command had been created, the history of the country would have been different.

Analysis of such counterfactuals allows for a deeper examination of Solzhenitsyn's narrative technique in both *The Gulag Archipelago* and in

39 Trans. Nikita Mikhaylov. This quotation is missing in the English translation of *The Gulag Archipelago*, since Chapter 6 in Part One (the piece on the history of the Vlasov movement) was revised and expanded by the author. In the meantime, the English translation, which is regularly reprinted, is based on the first Paris edition of the book.

40 Solzhenitsyn, *Arkhipelag Gulag. Chasti I–II* [vol. 1], 231. Italics in the original.

The Red Wheel. I would argue that it was *The Gulag Archipelago* that gave Solzhenitsyn the chance to test the new narrative technique and the structure connected to it when dealing with the historical material that would later form the basis for *The Red Wheel*: namely, working exclusively with key moments in history. Starting with *The Gulag Archipelago*, Solzhenitsyn focuses on not only providing a conscientious rendering of events in these key moments, but also on the search for alternatives and the reasons why certain opportunities were lost or remained unused.

In *The Gulag Archipelago*, as in *The Red Wheel*, Solzhenitsyn constructs the nodes in history, occasionally refraining from the use of explicit counterfactual statements. This modality may be implicitly present in the text—as it was, for instance, in the chapter "The Law Matures" in the first volume of *The Gulag Archipelago*. There Solzhenitsyn describes the trials of the 1920–30s: the Socialist-Revolutionaries Trial of 1922, the Shakhty case of 1928, and the 1930 trial of the "Promparty" (or Industrial Party). Here is an example of Solzhenitsyn's conclusions from the analysis of what he considers the key moment of 1928:

> It was precisely at this moment that an important step was taken towards universal participation in sewage disposal, universal distribution of responsibility for it. Those who had not yet been swept bodily down the sewer hatches, who had not yet been carried through the pipes to the Archipelago, had to march up above, carrying banners praising the trials, and rejoicing at the judicial reprisals.[41]

> Именно с этого момента предпринят важный шаг ко всенародному участию в канализации, ко всенародному распределению ответственности за неё: те, кто своими телами ещё не грохнулись в канализационные люки, кого ещё не понесли трубы на Архипелаг, – те должны ходить поверху со знамёнами, славить суды и радоваться судебным расправам.[42]

Those early show trials are, for Solzhenitsyn, nodes of history with the potential to bring a change. However, the Promparty Trial of 1930 is described not as a node of probable history but as a point signifying the moment that secured the course of history which had been determined by an earlier

41 Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 1, 47.
42 Solzhenitsyn, *Arkhipelag Gulag. Chasti I–II* [vol. 1], 59.

choice. In Solzhenitsyn's words, it was during this trial, this "turning point in our history," that rallies and demonstrations took place outside the courthouse walls[43]—rallies where schoolchildren were among the participants, where crowds demanded "Death! Death! Death!," whereas the solitary voices of protest fell silent. The points in history described here determined, in Sozhenitsyn's view, the gradual nature of the inevitable nationwide downfall, slow at first, then more rapid, which reached its climax in 1937. Solzhenitsyn singles out 1937 not because it brought the greatest number of victims (he states that their numbers in 1929–30, and later, in 1944–46, were no different) but because "it was that year that broke the soul of our will and swamped it in mass corruption."[44]

My last example of a counterfactual present and the construction of an alternative historical path in the text of *The Gulag Archipelago* refers to the historical moment of 1955–56:

> All the same, the alarm of the practical workers was not baseless. In 1955–1956 the stars over the Archipelago were in a conjunction never seen before. These were fateful years for it, and might have been its last!
>
> If the people who were invested with supreme power and weighed down with the fullness of their knowledge about their country had also been steeped in that Doctrine of theirs, but believed in it genuinely and wholeheartedly, surely those years were the time for them to look back in horror and to sob aloud. …
>
> Rulers change, the Archipelago remains.
>
> It remains because *that particular* political regime could not survive without it. If it disbanded the Archipelago, it would cease to exist itself.[45]

> Но всё же не пуст был переполох Практических Работников: небывалое сочетание звёзд сошлось на небе Архипелага в 1955–1956 годах. Это были его роковые годы и могли бы стать его последние годы!
>
> Если бы люди, облечённые высшей властью и отягчённые полнотой информации о своей стране, ещё могли бы в эти годы оглянуться, и ужаснуться, и зарыдать? Ведь кровавый мешок за спиной, он весь сочится, он пятнает багрово всю спину! …
>
> Правители меняются. Архипелаг остаётся.

43 Ibid., 48.

44 Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 1, 47.

45 Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 3, 491, 494. Italics in the original.

> Он потому остаётся, что *этот* государственный режим не мог бы устоять без него. Распустивши Архипелаг, он и сам перестал бы *быть*.[46]

Through several simultaneous counterfactual statements in this passage, Solzenitsyn analyzes the selected critical point that did occur but that failed to lead to the desired radical change in Russian history. And his conclusion—that if the political regime "disbanded the Archipelago, it would cease to exist itself"—is by no means less radical: that those clothed with authority alongside the political system that gave birth to the Gulag monstrosity would have disbanded themselves. This makes the presented unrealized choice not simply a lost opportunity but almost a utopian historical alternative, similar to that offered by Solzhenitsyn to the Soviet authorities in his famous *Letter to the Soviet Leaders* in 1974.

5 Concluding Remarks

In *The Gulag Archipelago*, Solzhenitsyn repeatedly employs the device of counterfactual statements, which seem to serve several purposes at the same time. Firstly, he uses them to search for historical causes, the answer to the question "Why?" Why was it so easy to make mass arrests? Why was nobody aware of their scale? Why did those who were apprehended not try to resist? With the aid of counterfactual statements, Solzhenitsyn attempts to uncover the causes of the expansion and strengthening of the Gulag system. Still, while using counterfactuals in his search for reasons, and giving a detailed account of each situation, Solzhenitsyn does not step outside the methodological framework employed by professional historians who use counterfactuals for precisely such purposes.[47] However, Solzhenitsyn also brings to the foreground the question "Could it have been otherwise?" When describing various stages of the system, Solzhenitsyn time and again notes that in these situations a different choice could have been made. Paradoxically, however, many of his assumptions can show that choice, in fact, never existed. A similar function is fulfilled by the implicit counterfactual situations, which Solzhenitsyn creates for the evaluation of historical figures.

46 Solzhenitsyn, *Arkhipelag Gulag*. *Chasti V–VII* [vol. 3], 440–441, 443. Italics in the original.

47 See Bulhof, "What if? Modality and History," 147; Richard J. Evans, *Altered Pasts*: *Counterfactuals in History* (London: 2014), 167–168.

Besides this function, the counterfactuals also serve as a tool for constructing the nodes, thus demonstrating the significance of the events described and indicating their key role in history. It is not the importance of an event that triggers the use of counterfactual statements. Rather, it is the counterfactual alternative that serves as a measure of the importance of a specific historical moment.

Judging from Solzhenitsyn's own words in the introduction to Volume Three of *The Gulag Archipelago*, this period was for him, first of all, "the world of concentration camps, corrupt as everything within the Soviet system."[48] However, I disagree with the thesis that history in *The Gulag Archipelago* comes to a total halt. The narrative as Solzhenitsyn constructs it not only permits but requires the unalterable continuation of the course of history—with opportunities for actual and potential change. *The Gulag Archipelago* contains the crucial nodes, and Solzhenitsyn utilizes the resources of diachronic analysis. By employing modal statements, he constructs a system of nodes of counterfactual history for the period he describes. However, unlike in *The Red Wheel*, the nodes that emerge in the narrative of the *Archipelago* do not determine its composition; rather, in aligning the nodes against the backdrop of modality, Solzhenitsyn traces the reinforcement of the Gulag system.

However, we also find variety in Solzhenitsyn's approaches to history within *The Red Wheel* and *The Gulag Archipelago*, resulting from the difference between the two historical periods. Regardless of what the driving force of history is, in the *Archipelago* the individual has nothing to do with the dynamic "selected few" from among the free people of *The Red Wheel*. Rather, he is a human who has lost "the measure of freedom."[49] Solzhenitsyn's history of the Gulag goes hand in hand with the history of losing freedom. However, in examining the theme of resistance and the issue of collective responsibility closely connected to counterfactuals, he is concerned with the question of the (unrealized) opportunities of acquiring inner freedom for each individual. In his later essays, Solzhenitsyn seems quite optimistic,[50] but this is more complex in *The Gulag Archipelago*; the narrator's famous exclamation—"Bless you,

48 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "Preface to the English Translation," in *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918–1956. An Experiment in Literary Investigation*, trans. Harry Willets, vol. 3 (New York: 2007), xvii.

49 Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 1, 143.

50 Or, as Solzhenitsyn himself wrote in 1974: "[Л]юди определяют свое будущее сами, и на любой точке искривленного и ниспадшего пути не бывает поздно повернуть к доброму и лучшему. Будущее – неистребимо и оно в наших руках." Solzhenitsyn, "Obrazovanshchina" [Smatterers], *Publitsistika v trekh tomakh*, vol. 1, 125. ["[H]uman beings determine their future themselves, and whatever point has been reached on the

prison, for having been in my life!"—is immediately contested by voices from the grave ("It is very well for you to say that—when you came out of it alive!").[51] In that respect, a work of literature is necessarily different from a political essay.

Since the time when Lotman wrote of the universally binding necessity to explore exclusively historical facts as dictated by the Hegelian consciousness, and when Solzhenitsyn wrote of the scholarly ban on the use of the counterfactual *conditional*, the interest of professional historians and theorists of history towards counterfactual history has grown significantly.[52] It is generally accepted that speculations on the possible ways of development, different states of the world and, thus, counterfactual statements which express those hypothetical notions, are a necessity for historians. History as an academic discipline presupposes such things, which make sense only once we are open to alternate courses of events. Solzhenitsyn was able to merge the methods of a fiction writer and those of a historian. Consequently, his use of counterfactuals does not necessarily refer the reader exclusively to the sphere of professional history or exclusively to fiction: it is situated on the fringes of methods used by professional scholars of history and of the literary devices, thereby touching on the relations between literature and history.

Analyzing counterfactuals in *The Gulag Archipelago* and its central themes linked to those devices offers an opportunity to examine not only the issue of Solzhenitsyn's concept of history in his works, but also the possibilities of exploring history by means of methods accessible only for works of fiction. "An experiment in literary investigation," as Solzhenitsyn himself defined the genre of *The Gulag Archipelago*, is not simply an experiment in investigating the nature of Gulag's history. It is also an experiment in investigating the sphere of the (lost) freedom of the individual within the limits of the Gulag system. As Lotman put it, "The genius of art, in general, is a mental experimentation, which allows us to test inviolability of the various structures of the world. This also determines the relation of art to reality. It verifies the impact of experimentation through the consequent expansion or limitation of freedom."[53] In history there is no such thing as "what if": but it exists both in literature and in historiography.

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crooked, descending path, it is never too late to take a turn for the good and the better. The future is indestructible, and it is in our hands." Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "Smatterers," in idem et al., *From Under the Rubble*, trans. A. M. Brock et al. (Washington D.C.: 1989), 270.]

51 Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 2, 617.

52 See Evans, *Altered Pasts*.

53 Lotman, *Culture and Explosion*, 151.

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CHAPTER 9

The Gulag Archipelago: Rhetoric of History

Elena Mikhailik

1 Sapropel Committee as a Triton

It is said that the devil is in the details. Sometimes, it seems, the devil can also be found not just in the details, but also in the details surrounding other details—in the way those details are perceived and treated… or not.

Here I start my examination of the multifaceted relationship of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Arkhipelag Gulag* (*The Gulag Archipelago*) with history, by looking at a line from Volume One, a line that has no major influence on the text as the whole:

> The very same year, 1921, the entire Sapropel[1] Committee, part of the Commission for Assisting the Forces of Nature, was shot.[2]
>
> В том же 1921 был расстрелян весь Сапропелиевый комитет, входивший в Комиссию Содействия Природным Силам.[3]

This brief sentence may offer a new perspective on how the Soviet Union was perceived by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's audience, and the nature of his "experiment in literary investigation." No Druid-like "Commission for Assisting the Forces of Nature" had ever existed in the Soviet Union. Instead, there was a highly practical Commission for the Study of the Natural Productive Forces of Russia (KEPS), created in 1915 by Vladimir Vernadskii in order to service the country's wartime needs. That Commission was still in operation when

1 "The term *sapropel* is used in a generic sense to describe fine-grained and unconsolidated sediments rich in organic matter that have been deposited under water." *Encyclopedia of Paleoclimatology and Ancient Environments*, ed. Vivien Gornitz (Dordrecht: 2009), 874.

2 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the Russian are my own. [E.M.]

3 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Arkhipelag Gulag 1918–1956. Opyt khudozheshtvennogo issledovaniia* [The Gulag Archipelago 1918–1956. An Experiment in Literary Investigation], vol. 1 (Ekaterinburg: 2006), 100.

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Solzhenitsyn wrote his *Archipelago;* and it continues today, as one of the subdivisions of the Russian Academy of Science.[4]

Given the conditions under which Solzhenitsyn was writing *The Archipelago* and the degree to which he trusted his assistants and eyewitness sources, the confusion regarding the existence of a "Commission for Assisting the Forces of Nature" seems neither surprising nor significant, and may have originated as a misprint. However, the first volume of *The Gulag Archipelago* appeared in 1973 and was thus exposed to external scrutiny. For 45 years this book has been published and republished, first in the West and then in post-perestroika Russia, its author both vilified as a liar and extolled as a prophet—while an obvious and easily verifiable error has passed entirely unnoticed.[5]

This could be partly due to the fact that anyone familiar with the Soviet bureaucracy might find it quite plausible that such a committee could have been both created and/or shot in the hectic early days of the regime—and partly, as may be suspected, because neither the majority of Solzhenitsyn's detractors nor his defenders had actually read his book as a work of history in the technical meaning of the word,[6] despite claims to the contrary.

And neither, apparently, had Solzhenitsyn. In addition to naming *The Gulag Archipelago* "An Experiment in Literary Investigation/Artistic Analysis," Solzhenitsyn added an afterword explaining that the circumstances under which the book had been compiled

a) secretly and on the move (for if the manuscript were discovered it would have been destroyed);

4 The Sapropel Committee had run afoul of the Soviet regime on two separate occasions, in 1921 and again in 1934, but by some oversight of the powers concerned was never wiped out to a man.

5 It is safe to say that *The Gulag Archipelago* has been analyzed and scrutinized in every way possible. Both professional and amateur scholars continue to search the text for discrepancies. For example, see a lively Facebook discussion on whether the early Gulag official Dmitrii Uspenskii had really killed his father or not: https://www.facebook.com/alexander.dyukov.9/posts/1665806936792369. Accessed February 2, 2018.

6 Several authors took care to articulate that distance, e.g., Anne Applebaum in her foreword to the 2007 Harper Collins edition of *The Gulag Archipelago* specified that "'An Experiment in Literary Investigation' "remains the best description of a work which is otherwise impossible to categorize," the book being 'not quite a straight history'." Anne Applebaum "'Arkhipelag Gulag.' Predislovie k niuiorkskomu izdaniu 2007 goda" [*The Gulag Archipelago*: Preface to the New York edition of 2007], in *Solzhenitsyn: Myslitel, istorik, khudozhnik. Zapadnaiia kritika 1974–2008* [Solzhenitsyn: Thinker, Historian, and Artist. Western Criticism 1974–2008], ed. E. E. Erikson (Moscow: 2010), 379; or Ronald Vroon, who made a powerful argument for seeing *The Gulag Archipelago* as a piece of litigation, thus placing it in a very different context: Ronald Vroon, "Literaturnoe proizvedenie kak sudebny protsess: Arkhipelag Gulag" [Literature as Litigation: The Gulag Archipelago.], in ibid., 417–446.

b) without its author having had a chance to re-read the corpus as a whole
c) …let alone to consult reliable archive sources,

were not conducive to either precision or consistency, indicating that to a certain extent these should not be expected by the reader.

Later on, Solzhenitsyn appended another afterword to an amended version of *The Gulag Archipelago* and then yet another in 1979, in which he stated that although after moving to the United States his access to sources had improved, and he had both time and breathing space to put the finishing touches to his work, his intention from that point on was to refrain from adding any further amendments and to leave the *Archipelago* in its current (still imperfect) state as a testimony of the times in which it had been written and the damaged memory of the prison camp inmates: "Once created in the darkness of the USSR by the jolts and fire of *zek*-ian memories, it should remain true to what it had grown from."[7]

Given these limitations, if *The Gulag Archipelago* is indeed a history—what exactly is it a history of?

2 Discrepancies That Become Evidence

Let us take a step back.

On the surface, *The Gulag Archipelago* was written as account of the Gulag as an institution and as a physical entity from the year of its birth (that happened to coincide with that of Solzhenitsyn), to the year it was disassembled by the very regime that had created it.

That account painstakingly covered:

a) the physical and economic geography and the internal structure of the forced labor system (from prisons to railroad caravans, to ordinary labor camps, to the special political forced labor camps, and, finally, internal exile), and
b) its social and economic function within society.

It also described

c) all the less permanent but sufficiently long-term political, legal, social, and infrastructural changes that generated the various streams of people who were conscripted to populate its islands.

7 "Созданная во тьме СССР толчками и огнём зэческих памятей, она должна остаться на том, на чём выросла." Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 2, 81–82.

Moreover, it traced

d) the passage of a single inmate—the narrator—through the bowels of the system from arrest to liberation, with his external physical route serving, in a sense, both as an activator and as a mirror of his internal pilgrim's progress from sin to redemption (as well as from the slow geographical and institutional time of the Archipelago to the quick pace of eventual history leading to its ruin).

The book also looked at the camps

e) in terms of social anthropology, describing local habits, customs, and practices, as well as their origins.

This last point stands, despite the semi-sarcastic way in which the narration goes about it, for example calling the inmates ("zeks") a "tribe," an "indigenous population" or a "nation"—actually embedding a satirical pseudo-anthropological report right in the middle of a serious social representation of the Archipelago.[8] After all, it was a prison camp, and the makeshift anthropological tools were still very much part of the story's toolbox.

One might even suggest that this structure made *The Gulag Archipelago* an ironic relative of Fernand Braudel's *The Mediterranean*—as if Solzhenitsyn were partly applying the concept of multilayered semi-long-term history without even being aware of doing so.[9] However, it would seem that *The Gulag Archipelago* had one thing that *The Mediterranean* definitely lacked: an external purpose, a real-time political goal that the author wanted to achieve beyond the limits offered by history. That purpose pervades the narrative in many ways, one of which being authorial "carelessness."

From a purely practical point of view, in telling the story of the Soviet prison camps for the first time ever, one would surely strive for maximum precision. Yet, as is clear from the afterword, the *Archipelago* is not just the story of the labor camps or of the country that had created those camps, but to a large degree the story of the country in which this particular book about the camps came to be written in the way in which it had to be written.

It is the story of a place where, even after the demise of the title institution in 1956, no records were made available to the public; no transparent data were collected to measure the scale of the blight; no Nuremberg trials were held;

8 Interestingly, despite having written a poisonous lampoon on Marxist methodology and portraying a "Marxist historian" as a hopeless doctrinaire desperate to ignore reality, Solzhenitsyn still describes the internal life of the camps in terms of class structure and the desired inmate behaviors in terms of class solidarity.

9 However, any real relation is highly improbable, as *The Mediterranean* was published in French in 1949 and is unlikely to have influenced Solzhenitsyn's work in any way.

(almost) no murderers were punished; (almost) no families were told where their loved ones were buried. The ideology that had enabled such human catastrophe was still held sacrosanct, and public memory forgot entire cohorts of victims.

Consequently, all the lacunae, errors, and discrepancies in *The Gulag Archipelago*, all the vanishing plotlines, all the utterances of "we might never know," the author's need to mask his sources to protect them (not only removing their names, but also reinterpreting and rephrasing the data they supplied),[10] and to conceal his interest in certain subjects and to consult even open sources by proxy,[11] the need to extrapolate statistics that could not be legally—or even illegally—obtained within the Soviet Union (Solzhenitsyn estimated the death toll at Belomorcanal to be around 250,000,[12] while in reality it was tens and not hundreds of thousands),[13] and the narrator's inability to construct a coherent picture did indeed serve as testimony to the state of affairs at that particular point in time—just as Solzhenitsyn has claimed. It was evidence that the Archipelago was still very much part of the country's landscape precisely because it was officially not supposed to be there.

3 Discrepancies as a Sub-plot

As well as inconsistencies of this type, there existed another variety that had nothing to do with the availability/non-availabilty of information on the Archipelago, and that was not subjected to focused analysis despite being referenced.[14]

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10 This is yet another reason why the option of turning *The Gulag Archipelago* into an exercise in "written oral history" (the concept of oral history had not yet reached the Soviet mainstream at the time, although Viktor Duvakin had been working on it since 1967) was unavailable to Solzhenitsyn. If he had presented the stories of his sources in the form of coherent uninterrupted narration, the narrators could and would have been identified by the authorities—with foreseeable consequences.

11 Naturally, some of those assistants were less reliable than others.

12 Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 3, 501.

13 See for example, Nick Baron, "Conflict and Complicity: The Expansion of the Karelian Gulag, 1923–1933," *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, 42/2–4, (April–December 2001), 615–648, at 643.

14 E.g., when Martin Malia in his review notices Solzhenitsyn's claim that "the 'infamous' Third Section of Nicholas I had only 45 agents," he comments: "Here Solzhenitsyn is wrong on the figure—it was nearer to 1,500—though right in his basic point that by Soviet standards the Third Section was miniscule." Martin Malia, "A War on Two Fronts: Solzhenitsyn and the Gulag Archipelago," *The Russian Review*, vol. 36, no. 1 (January 1977),

While describing the differences between the squeamish and lackadaisical punitive system of the Russian Empire and the consistent and mighty one of the Soviet Union, Solzhenitsyn repeats on two separate occasions that Tsar Nicholas I had pardoned the common soldiers involved in the Decembrist rebellion.[15] Yet, anyone who took care to check[16] would find that even those soldiers who were officially "pardoned" were exiled to the Caucasus and officially consigned to the ranks of the army for life. Two years later, approximately a quarter of them had died. And that concerned only those whom Nicholas I had deemed innocent. Those suspected of independent action during the rebellion were thoroughly investigated and murderously beaten or exiled to Siberia, or both. In reality, the case that Solzhenitsyn cited as an example of a reasonable and merciful approach had in fact been an instance of the exact opposite.

Another, even more vivid, example of a similar attitude is found in Solzhenitsyn's description of the state of semi- and sometimes outright starvation in the prison camps. He states that "For the greater part of its history old Russia was unacquainted with famine. 'In Russia no one has ever died of starvation,' says the proverb. And proverbs do not deal in hot air. The serfs were slaves, but their bellies were full."[17]

To begin with, the proverb "На Руси никто с голоду не умирывал" ("In Russia no one has ever died of starvation") comes from the famous *Explanatory Dictionary of the Living Great Russian Language* by Vladimir Dal' and can be found under the entry "hunger."[18] This section is quite extensive (680 words);

456–460, at 56–57. He does so without indicating how Solzhenitsyn had arrived at that figure (in fact, he had counted office staff only).

15 "И уж, конечно, помилованы все солдаты, вовлечённые в мятеж." [And naturally all the common soldiers, drawn into the rising, were pardoned.] "Например, солдаты, стоявшие в декабристском каре, – в с е д о е д и н о г о были прощены через четыре дня." [For example, the common soldiers who stood in the infantry square during the Decembrist Rising were pardoned four days later, each and every one of them.] Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 1, 129; vol. 3, 72).

16 The Decembrist Rebellion was a popular—and legitimate—topic in Soviet Russia, so materials on the subject were available and safe to access. See Ludmila A. Trigos, *The Decembrist Myth in Russian Culture* (New York: 2009), Olga Edelman, "Mif o dekabristakh" [The Decembrist Myth], accessed February 2, 2018, https://arzamas.academy/materials/906.

17 "Большую часть своей истории прежняя Россия не знала голода. 'На Руси никто с голоду не умирывал,'—говорит пословица. А пословицы сбрёху не составят. Крепостные были рабы, но были сыты." Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 2, 120.

18 Vladimir Dal', *Tolkovyi Slovar Zhivogo Russkogo Iazyka* [Explanatory Dictionary of the Living Great Russian Language] (Moscow: 2014), 1033–1035.

moreover, multiple references to hunger and famine occur in other entries, for example when "leisure time" is defined as "time when there is no famine or want, an autumn or the time when no epidemics abound."[19] One begins to suspect that Solzhenitsyn's picture of peasant life according to Vladimir Dahl was slightly more optimistic than was warranted by any reasonable measure. In fact, the proverb Solzhenitsyn quotes is printed right next to another one, "С голоду не мрут, только пухнут…" ("You don't die from a famine, you just bloat out…"), and the reader does not have to be a specialist in Russian folklore to realize that both proverbs are reeking with the same venomous irony.

This is a highly significant point, for in *The Gulag Archipelago* there is always an eye in the sky—an eye that sees all and accords to every single thing its proper weight and value—and that eye belongs to Vladimir Dal'. *The Explanatory Dictionary* is probably the most-quoted work in the *Archipelago* and holds unique factual and moral authority there. As Igor Sukhikh notes, in his thought-provoking article "Skazanie o tritone" ("The Tale of a Triton"), "Proverbs [that come from the self-same dictionary] in *The Archipelago* lay claim to being the final say, the last word."[20] And yet, Solzhenitsyn is willing to sacrifice that final say to keep the image of the idyllic Old Russia intact.

Moreover, the history of famines in the Russian Empire has also been quite well-researched. The general consensus (reached before the Revolution) had been that hunger was a constant factor in the life of the country, and that responsible governments tried to emplace permanent measures against it (though those measures were not always adequate), while less-responsible governments did not (usually with catastrophic results).

As for the privately owned serfs (whose bellies, according to Solzhenitsyn, were full), their condition in the 19th century had in fact been so dismal that several imperial economists indicated that, as early as the 1830s, the number of deaths across the country for the people of that social station had exceeded the number of births.[21]

On the other hand, mortality rates under the Empire, even at their most catastrophic, never came close to those of the great famines of the 1920s and

19 "Вольготная пора … время когда нет голода, нужды, осень, или пора, когда не ходят повальные болезни." Ibid., 684.

20 "Пословицы в 'Архипелаге' претендуют на статус итоговой оценки, последнего слова." I. Sukhikh, "Skazanie o tritone 1958–1968" [The Tale of a Triton 1958–1968], *Zvezda* 12 (2001), 214–226.

21 See for example N. Ch. Bunge, "Izmenenia soslovnogo sostava naselenia Rossii v promezhutok vremeni mezhdu 7 i 8, 8 i 9 reviziiami" [Changes in the Russian population structure by social estate as occurring between the 7th and the 8th and the 8th and the 9th audits], *Ekonomicheskii Ukazatel* 44 (1857), 1022–1030.

1930s; and the imperial justice system of the 19th and 20th centuries, even at its most callous and corrupt, never began to approach the mortality and the imprisonment rates of the pre-1953 Soviet regime and its sheer disregard for justice. Any comparison between the two structures would have come out heavily in favor of the Russian Empire.

Therefore, in order to draw obvious conclusions as to the nature of the Gulag and the government that created and relied on it, there was no need to claim that pre-Revolutionary Russia knew no famine and no systemic injustice, or that the God-fearing Old Believers of the pre-Petrine 16th century were free of self-seeking materialism of the later eras[22]—or, indeed, to make any of the extravagant claims sprinkled throughout *The Gulag Archipelago*.

Igor Sukhikh suggests that this perfect image of the non-Soviet Russia is used in the *Archipelago* to serve as "a standing point in the world turned upside down, a light in a distant window that allows one to hold on to hope"[23]—yet what hope can those images provide if they are likely to be refuted at the schoolbook level? In fact, the very presence of those easily disprovable statements would make the authorial position unnecessarily engaged and vulnerable—and might render the reader more inclined to dismiss the rest of the narrative.

Yet, these dangerous constructs crop up in the *Archipelago* whenever Old Russia is mentioned. The country before the revolution is repeatedly portrayed as a vanished land of plenty[24] (interestingly, it is presented the same way in "One Day in Life of Ivan Denisovich," but not in *The Red Wheel*); a land of mercy, with an active and productive population, well-developed popular opinion, sincere belief in God, and reasonably sane government—regardless of the facts of the case and, more importantly, the ease with which these "facts" could be disproved by both the author and his audience.

This blissful image of Russia's past is even exempt from the general polyphony of *The Archipelago*. It has been mentioned on more than one occasion

22 Миллионам наших соотечественников невместимо представить, чтобы человеком … могло двигать что-нибудь, кроме корысти! … Откуда это к нам пришло? Отступя лет триста назад, – разве в Руси старообрядческой могло такое быть? [Millions of our compatriots could not even entertain the idea that a human being … could be driven by anything but cupidity! Where did that thing come upon us? If we step back three hundred years, could we see anything like this happening in the Old Believer Rus?] Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 2, 494.

23 "как точка опоры в перевернутом мире, как свет в далеком окне, позволяющий сохранить надежду." I. Sukhikh, "Skazanie o tritone," 214–226.

24 Referring to its former state as "bounteous Russia" (Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 1, 58), etc.

that Solzhenitsyn's view that any valid historical description should be multifaceted by definition,[25] as well as his typical swarm of alternative positions and contradictory viewpoints, are very much present in *The Gulag Archipelago*.[26] The narrator speaks and allows others to speak (and the very literary device that permits Solzhenitsyn to rely on open official sources gives the Soviet regime its own voice within the book); the narrator argues his points and allows his opponents to argue theirs;[27] the narrator arrives at decisive, sweeping, provocative conclusions—and immediately provides the audience with a viewpoint from which even his heartfelt credo could be undermined. The most famous example of the latter is the powerful ending of the chapter "The Soul and Barbed Wire": 'I have served enough time there [in prison]. I cultivated my soul there, and I say with determination: "Bless you, prison, for having been in my life!"' This is immediately followed by a no less powerful and corrosive refutation: "And from the graves comes a reply: It is very well for you to say that—you survived!"[28]

The narrator is willing to test (and subvert) everything, even his core beliefs—just not the concept of the lost city of Kitezh.

And Kitezh it definitely is. The sheer metaphoric scale can be illustrated by the following passage about the Solovki Monastery—a 15th century Russian Orthodox heritage site that in the late 1920s was turned into one the

25 See his stance on *The Red Wheel*: "This is a principle of mine: a single man, with his personal viewpoint and attitudes, cannot convey the whole course of events and their significance. It is essential that even the main leading characters, the author's favorites, should run into dozens, with a cast of hundreds in all." Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "An Interview on Literary Themes with Nikita Struve, March 1976," in *Solzhenitsyn in Exile: Critical Essays and Documentary Materials*, eds. John B. Dunlop, Richard S. Haugh, and Michael Nicholson (Stanford: 1985), 300.

26 A. M. Ranchin, "'Arhipelag Gulag' A. I. Solzhenitsyna kak khudozhestvennyi tekst: nekotorye nabliudeniia" [A. I. Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* as a Literary Text: Some Observations], accessed February 10, 2018, https://www.portal-slovo.ru/philology/40042.php; Pavel Spivakovskii, "Polifonicheskaia kartina mira u F. M. Dostoevskogo i A. I. Solzhenitsyna" [Polyphonic Worldview in the Works of Fedor Dostoevskii and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn], in *Mezhdu dvumia iubileiami: Pisateli, kritiki, literaturovedy o tvorchestve A.I. Solzhenitsyna* [Between the Two Anniversaries: Writers, Literary Critics and Scholars on A. I. Solzhenitsyn] (Moscow: 2005), 414–423.

27 Russian readers would have been familiar with this approach, for the 19th century novel *What Is To Be Done?* by Nikolai Chernyshevsky had been part of the school curriculum for generations, and its narrator used a technique termed "reader with the penetrating eye" to give (limited) voice to his collective opponents in a very similar manner.

28 "Я—достаточно там посидел, я душу там взрастил и говорю непреклонно:—Благословение тебе, тюрьма, что ты была в моей жизни! (А из могил мне отвечают:—Хорошо тебе говорить, когда ты жив остался!)" Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 2, 501.

first islands of the Archipelago—and a prize breed of herring that used to be caught and salted by its monks:

> They [the fishermen monks] were removed from Solovki as late as around 1930—and as of that time the catches came to an end: no one was able to find that herring any more, as if it had vanished from the face of the sea.
>
> Их убрали с Соловков лишь около 1930 г. – и с тех пор прекратились уловы: никто больше не мог той селёдки в море найти, как будто она совсем исчезла.[29]

In reality, reports of the herring's desertion/demise have been greatly exaggerated. Its continuous presence both in the sea and on the menu in the early 1930s was reported by several reliable witnesses, some of whom were quoted in *The Gulag Archipelago* on other matters or became short-term characters.[30]

Once again, the error is easily established and seems utterly unnecessary. On the surface, the tale of vanishing herring adds nothing to the story of the Gulag. Why insert it?

Here we can at least tentatively establish the source that Solzhenitsyn used and trace the way in which that source was transformed. The list of witnesses in the Archipelago includes Dmitrii Sergeevich Likhachev,[31] an outstanding Russian medievalist who was an inmate at the Solovki labor camp in the late 1920s and early 1930s. He actually mentions his contacts with Solzhenitsyn in his memoirs.[32] He also speaks of the monks, of the delicious local herring, and of its ultimate fate:

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29 Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 1, 26.

30 Mikhail Prishvin, who visited Solovki in 1933, noted that "В Белом море теперь видообразование, из таких видов, напр., сельдь (соловецкая) и треска." [In the White Sea the speciation involves the following species, for example, herring (the Solovki breed) and cod], Mikhail Prishvin, *Dnevniki 1932–1935* [Diaries 1932–1935] (St. Petersburg: 2009), 281. So, three years after 1930, far from becoming extinct, the Solovki herring was described by an authoritative naturalist in terms of evolutionary development. Pavel Florenskii, a Russian Orthodox priest, philosopher, mathematician, physicist, electrical engineer, etc., who was exiled to Solovki several years later, mentioned in a letter written in 1935 that he had tried the famous herring and that it happened to be extraordinary, albeit poorly salted.

31 Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 1, 15.

32 Dmitrii Likhachev, *Reflections on the Russian Soul: A Memoir*, trans. Bernard Adams (Budapest: 2000), 88.

> The monks were experts at fishing with nets, they understood the currents and knew the routes taken by the fish and so on. They caught navaga [*a small type of cod*], but most importantly the famous Solovki herring … When the Onufrievskaya Church was closed the herring 'disappeared' (perhaps as a mark of the failure of USLON to fulfill its obligations to the monks?)[33]

Here, Likhachev is implying that the Solovki monks simply went on an undeclared strike and stopped catching herring once the prison camp authorities reneged on the initial deal and closed their church. In his version of the story there is nothing mystical about that disappearance.

In the *Archipelago*, however, the Solovki herring becomes part of a much more folklorized narrative. It turns into an analogue of Robert Stevenson's Heather Ale[34]—a valuable heritage of a destroyed society that could not be claimed by a usurper. It goes underwater and becomes a myth. Within the limits of Solzhenitsyn's text, no historical monastery herring could survive the advent of the Soviet regime. It had to disappear, along with the monks and all the other good pre-Revolutionary things. There was no room left for it in the new world.

4 Resistance as a Privilege

In fact, the Solovki herring is not the only thing that is lost. Something else more important disappears with almost the same finality: the people. Or, rather, the *good people*. The workers, the industrious peasants, the scholars, the officers, even the revolutionaries of the Old Russia vanish down the drain of the Gulag—and that feeling of loss is almost palpable. They die out, leaving behind the "us" of the *Archipelago*, the "withered and nasty" corrupt, atomized individuals, who, in a sense, deserve to be arrested—ironically—not because of what they have done, but because of what they failed to do, for not being the enemies of the state they should have been.

> How it burned us in the camps later: what if every security operative going out at night to make arrests, had been unsure whether he would be coming back alive and had to say goodbye to his family? … The Secret

33 Ibid., 96–97.

34 See, e.g., https://www.poetryloverspage.com/poets/stevenson/heather_ale.htm.

> Services would have quickly run short of personnel and rolling stock, and—regardless of all Stalin's cravings—the cursed mechanism would have ground to a halt.
> What if… What if… we simply deserved everything that happened next.
>
> Как потом в лагерях жгло: а что, если бы каждый оперативник, идя ночью арестовывать, не был бы уверен, вернётся ли он живым, и прощался бы со своей семьёй? … Органы быстро бы не досчитались сотрудников и подвижного состава, и несмотря на всю жажду Сталина—остановилась бы проклятая машина!
> Если бы… если бы… Мы просто заслужили всё дальнейшее.[35]

Even more interesting is that the general lack of strength, awareness, humanity, and virtue is mentioned even when the narration provides examples to the contrary. While describing some act of dignity or decency, the narrator would often lament: "Ah, if only our people had all been like that! – no way in hell would they have ended behind bars! The blasted teeth would have jammed!"[36] "If we all were that proud and strong, what tyrant could have retained his power?"[37]

This concept of non-resistance to evil as a cardinal sin (with the associated idea of sinful persons being incapable of true resistance) sometimes does odd things to the text of *The Gulag Archipelago*, moving the narrator to ignore things he would otherwise tend to pay attention to. Take, for instance, the powerful depiction of a mass execution at Vorkuta in 1938 (the "Kashketin shootings," named after the organizer, the NKVD Lieutenant Yefim Kashketin):

> The column marched with vigor. Out there a new life was awaiting them, a new activity that, however grueling it may be, would be no worse than all that waiting. The sledges had fallen far behind. The troops too began to fall behind, no longer marching ahead of them or to their sides, but only at the rear. Well, that weakness of the escort was a good sign too. The sun shone. Then all of a sudden, from a place unseen, somewhere out of the blinding snowy whiteout the rapid machine-gun fire came. Some inmates fell down, others were still standing—no one under-

35 Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 1, 15.

36 "Ах, весь наш народ был бы такой! – ни черта б его не сажали! заели бы проклятые зубья!" Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 3, 48.

37 "Если бы все мы были так горды и тверды – какой бы тиран удержался?" Ibid., 238.

> stood a thing. Death came in, clad in sun and snow, free from sin, full of mercy.
>
> Колонна шла бодро: ждала их какая-то новая жизнь, новая деятельность, пусть изнурительная, но не хуже этого ожидания. А сани далеко отстали. И конвой стал отставать – ни впереди, ни сбоку уже не шёл, а только сзади. Что ж, слабость конвоя – это тоже добрый признак. Светило солнце. И вдруг по чёрной идущей колонне невидимо откуда, из ослепительной снежной пелены, открыт был частый пулемётный огонь. Арестанты падали, другие ещё стояли, и никто ничего не понимал. Смерть пришла в солнечно-снежных ризах, безгрешная, милосердная.[38]

Those marching in the column were mainly members of the Trotskyist opposition who had participated in the 1936 hunger strike (earlier in the chapter, Solzhenitsyn describes how they had been tricked into abandoning the strike). Over a thousand of them were sent to a remote location and executed in the way described above.

The narrator tersely remarks, "It [i.e. the way they were murdered] was a Fantasia on a Theme of the coming war"[39] [the 1939/40 Winter War with Finland] and offers no insight whatsoever as to why that column of inmates had to be ambushed in the middle of nowhere with no infrastructure in place for mass execution or burial, thus creating extra problems for all those involved in the shooting (for what is an atrocity to one is a matter of logistics to another). In fact, that particular story is told as though this chain of events required no underlying reason beyond its aesthetic value (to the perpetrators, that is).

Yet there was one. Vladimir Zubchaninov, a former inmate who happened to be at Vorkuta at the time, explained in his memoirs[40] that those responsible for the shooting had originally wanted to make their job as easy as possible: the initial attempt at an execution involved summoning the inmates in groups of ten to the camp bathhouse, where right there, on the site, they would be killed. But the response was desperate physical resistance, first on the part of the victims and then the rest of the inmates in the camp, and that procedure had to be abandoned. The prisoners would have to be deceived, taken away from a familiar location and surprised on the road, not because the Gulag

38 Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 2, 313.

39 "Это была фантазия на тему будущей войны." Ibid., 313.

40 V. V. Zubchaninov, *Uvidennoe i perezhitoe* [What I Have Seen and Experienced] (Moscow: 1995), 83–84.

administration wanted to perform a snow extravaganza for reasons (or unreasons) of its own, but because those specific persons could not be easily executed in any other manner.

That is not to suggest that this concerns a case of omission on the part of the narrator of *The Gulag Archipelago*—most likely, two partial witnesses to the event that have later reported it to Solzhenitsyn were unaware of the underlying story—and the imagery had been powerful enough. Yet it seems noteworthy that the author, who actively engages in reconstruction and extrapolation elsewhere, does not consider that necessary in this situation.

The same approach is markedly present where the fate of the Sapropel Committee is described. Immediately after specifying that the Committee members had been shot for being implicated in a plot, Solzhenitsyn states, "Being quite aware of the attitude and the frame of mind of the Russian academic community at that time [1921], and not having those years blocked off by a smoke screen of fanaticism, we might, actually, need no excavations to figure out what that accusation was worth."[41] In his opinion, given the well-known, mostly left-wing if not outright pro-Soviet, sympathies of the academic circles, their (assumed) lack of moral strength, and the desperate need of the repressive agencies to show the Bolshevist government that their services were essential, any whiff of underground activity within academia could be nothing but a ridiculous fabrication.

Apparently, in that particular case, the opposite was true. Recent research[42] has shown that an umbrella anti-Bolshevist organization had indeed existed in St. Petersburg in 1921; that Professor Vladimir Tagantsev, the chair of the unfortunate Sapropel Committee, had been the coordinator of that organization and that the academic community had been well-represented there; and that the Soviet authorities, who had stumbled upon the plot by pure chance and were terrified by the idea of a united left-to-right underground and the specter of yet another Kronstadt rebellion (and reacted with characteristic lack of justice and proportion), would have much preferred for the whole thing to be a fabrication.

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41 "Достаточно зная склад и настроение русских учёных кругов того времени и не загороженные от тех лет дымовой завесой фанатизма, мы, пожалуй, и без раскопок сообразим, какова тому делу цена." Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 1, 100.

42 F. Perchenok, D. Zubaerv, "Na puti ot polupravd: O tagantsevskom dele i ne tolko o nem" [Departing from the Half-Truths: the Tagantsev Case and More], in *In Memoriam: Ist. Sb. Pamiati F. F. Perchenka* [Hist. coll. In the memory of F. F. Perchenka] (Moscow: 1995), 362–370; S. Izmozik, "Petrogradskaiia boevaia organizatsiia (PBO)—chekistskii mif ili realnost'?" [Petrograd Combat Organisation (PCO)—a Chekist myth or reality?], in *Istoricheskie chtenia na Lubianke. 1997–2007* [Lubianka Historical Readings. 1997–2007], ed. A. A. Zdanevich et al. (Moscow: 2008), 140–149.

Those details were not readily available within the Soviet Union. In fact, the informants that Solzhenitsyn could—and did—consult, like Anna Akhmatova, were likely to provide him with information to the contrary, partly out of conviction and partly because the only way one could hope at that time (1960s) to see Nikolai Gumilev's poetry published in Russia again was to insist that he had never directly opposed the Soviet regime and that the Tagantsev Plot he was shot for had been a 1937-esque trumped-up affair.

That information, however, had been available (and was later discovered) in the archives of the Russian émigré organizations; and Solzhenitsyn could—and did—consult them while preparing the second edition of *The Gulag Archipelago*. However, the sheer amounts of research he needed to do on the *Archipelago* were staggering, and the Tagantsev case seemed clear enough not to warrant further investigation.

As for why the Bolshevist regime in 1921 would shoot an entire committee involved in the production of desperately needed fuel—the answer in *The Gulag Archipelago* is clear: why would they not?

What makes these two examples especially relevant is that, in both cases, the author chooses to ignore information that clearly shows that something vital is missing from both stories—and this is the same author who had persuasively demonstrated that in a totalitarian state, in which most lines of communication were cut down, controlled or filled with static, people might (and probably would) remain ignorant of any incident of resistance, even if an uprising were taking place around the corner or had ended only a few days ago.[43]

Yet, somehow in the *Archipelago*, proper and systematic resistance to evil is assumed to go the way of the Solovki herring, at least until after the Second World War.

5 Why do the Soviet People Have to Be Traitors?

And here we arrive at the final major discrepancy. On one level, Solzhenitsyn insists in *The Gulag Archipelago* (he dedicates a whole chapter to the argu-

43 Note, for example, an incident in 1954, in which a group of representatives from a rebel camp at Kengir (Steplag) were taken to the nearby camp of Rudnik ['Mine'] in order to be shown the docile and loyal inmates there. The representatives looked and left, without realizing that unrest at Rudnik had been quelled only a very short while previously. (Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 3, 283).

ment) that, despite the many claims that there were no political prisoners in the USSR, the number of persons imprisoned or executed precisely for taking a stance on political issues, be it freedom of conscience or refusal to betray one's neighbors, was far higher than in the days of the Russian Empire, even though taking that stance involved more risks and required more courage. He also offers a highly detailed picture of the authorities' systemic efforts to atomize society, to keep people separate and politically ignorant, and to suppress the very idea that resistance was possible.

Combined, these trends create the image of a society overpowered and badly damaged, but still one that can immediately set about picking itself up and reorganizing itself along more human and humane lines as soon as the political pressure eases.

This becomes especially clear in Volume 3, when Solzhenitsyn describes the special prison camps and the autocatalytic evolution that took place there when an unintentional lessening of severity (which occurred when the authorities grouped political prisoners together in special camps, freeing them from the constant murderous oppression by career criminals, etc.) resulted in greater self-awareness and human decency, then solidarity, and finally resistance. The latter culminated in a series of mass protests after the death of Stalin, as well as the famous Kengir rising in 1954. Solzhenitsyn may portray the inmates in that section of the book as naive or weak, or too law-abiding for their own good, but they have a definite capacity for freedom.

It is here that yet another major shift takes place. Throughout Volumes 1 and 2, the Gulag is presented to the reader as something that, once formed, very quickly becomes a permanent fixture—literally "frozen in stone." All the stages through which an inmate is expected to pass, from the moment of arrest to a nameless grave, or no less nameless internal exile, no longer relate to history. They just exist. All examples illustrating any organizational or social features of the prison camps are deliberately drawn from a wide range of points in external time, as if to show that time is irrelevant here. But then, as soon as resistance becomes possible, the narration slides out of the long-term static mode into conventional "factual" history, organized on a reasonably linear chronological basis.

On one level, this is quite understandable:

a) In terms of access, most of the information on resistance available to Solzhenitsyn, including his personal experience, was linked tied to the late 1940s and early 50s—a period almost aligned with the demise of the Gulag system as such, thus establishing natural chronology.

b) And in terms of political argument, as Claude Lefort notes,[44] Solzhenitsyn first wants the reader to recognize the prison camps (and their underlying Leninist ideology) as an evil, so that fighting against that evil is accepted as legitimate action. He consequently avoids mentioning protests or physical resistance in the first volumes of the book, until he can feel reasonably certain of his audience.

From the reader's perspective, it seems as though only certain types of behavior could propel history, both within the Archipelago and within the Soviet Union as a whole—behavior of which the inhabitants of the special camps seem to be entirely capable. And yet, when talking about fellow inmates and fellow countrymen as human beings, the narrator almost inevitably discusses (and addresses) them in terms of personal and collective sin, personal and collective unworthiness, and the need for personal redemption through suffering.[45]

According to the narrator, the "state of human health" of the Soviet people is so dismal that they often require the extreme experience of prison in order to rediscover their basic capacity for love and friendship:

> Your soul, which used to be parched, is *filled with juice* through suffering. And you are slowly learning to love if not your neighbor, as a Christian, but at least those close to you.[46]

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44 Claude Lefort, "Ob 'Arkhipelage Gulag'" [On *The Gulag Archipelago*], in *Solzhenitsyn: Myslitel, istorik, khudozhnik. Zapadnaiia kritika 1974–2008* [Solzhenitsyn: Thinker, Historian, and Artist. Western Criticism 1974–2008], ed. E. E. Erikson (Moscow: 2010), 383–387, at 384–385.

45 This striking degree of inconsistency is illustrated in an incident in Volume 2, where a sympathetic linesman tells an escapee in a desperate need of assistance: "'We are all Russian people, aren't we? Just sit tight and don't come into sight.' They left. But the fugitive didn't believe them: they were Soviet people, after all, they had to report him. He crawled off toward the forest. From the edge of that forest he watched and saw the linesman return, bringing clothing and food." ["Да мы ж русские люди. Только сиди, не показывайся." Ушли. Но беглец не поверил им: они ведь – советские, они должны донести. И пополз к лесу. С краю леса он следил и увидел, как обходчик вернулся, принёс одежду и еду.] Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 2, 331. The situation on the surface is portrayed as black and white, as a "Russian" person would never betray a fugitive while a "Soviet" one would inevitably do it, but this is severely undermined by the fact that the "Soviet" linesman had actually delivered help, risking his freedom in the process. This scene is discussed from a slightly different angle by Maria Fedianina, "'Arkhipelag Gulag' A. I. Solzhenitsyna kak epopeia: Osobennosti poetiki" [A. I. Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Arkhipelago* as an Epopeia: Peculiarities of Its Poetics], in *Solzhenitsynskie Tetradi* [Solzhenitsyn Papers], 6 (1016), 103–120.

46 "Душа твоя, сухая прежде, от страдания *сочает*. Хотя бы не ближних, по-христиански, но близких ты теперь научаешься любить." Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 2, 496.

So while one part of the narration meticulously describes the economic, social, legal, and psychological drivers that made the Gulag what it was (with the best possible precision available to someone who had to do the job of a research institute, with only a tiny fraction of its resources), another part of the same narration ascribes the devastating effect that system had on the inmates and on society as a whole to the ethical deficiencies of the Soviet people.

In fact, the original 1973 YMCA Press version expressed that opinion directly—and with vehemence:

> What we were short of was love of freedom. But first and foremost, we lacked understanding of how the matters really stood. We spent ourselves in one unrestrained outburst in 1917, and then we RUSHED to bend our necks. We did that WITH PLEASURE!
>
> Не хватало нам свободолюбия. А еще прежде того осознания истинного положения. Мы истратились в одной безудержной вспышке семнадцатого года, а потом СПЕШИЛИ покориться. С УДОВОЛЬСТВИЕМ покорялись.[47]

6 History as a Receptacle for Values

In 1977 Joseph Brodsky wrote a review of the English translation of the *Gulag Archipelago* and the collection *From Under the Rubble*. He made a very perceptive observation concerning the issue those books (and all the individual essays in *From Under the Rubble*) had in common: a firm belief that the social catastrophe that has befallen Russia "holds out some sort of a lesson," representing a test "of the nation's moral viability."[48]

That position, however, involved an obvious implication: if there were a lesson to be learnt, then something could have been done differently by the whole nation. Brodsky carefully spells out all that follows from that initial statement:

"…any catastrophe at all, and that includes social catastrophe, is an existential phenomenon and as such is not charged with meaning. It is like the

47 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Arkhipelag Gulag 1918–1956. Opyt khudozheshtvennogo issledovaniia* [The Gulag Archipelago 1918–1956. An Experiment in Literary Investigation], (Paris: 1973), vol. 1, 27.

48 Joseph Brodsky, "Geography of Evil," trans. Barry Rubin, *Partisan Review* 44, no. 4 (1977), 637–645, at 641.

eruption of a volcano. The only lesson to be drawn from a catastrophe is that it *can happen*. The moral condition of a nation after a catastrophe (especially a social catastrophe) is the same as before the catastrophe. The opposite presumption would mean that a revolution (at least the revolution of 1917) is wrought by a whole nation… The opposite presumption would mean that Collectivization and the Terror of 1936–37 were the work of the people."[49]

It seems that this was exactly what Solzhenitsyn intended. For him, the very existence of the Gulag meant that there must have been an error somewhere, for an evil of that magnitude could not—should not—simply occur in the same way that natural disasters do. The Soviet regime itself might be irrational, but history had to have an underlying reason to it. There had to be some weakness, some sin that had allowed the October Revolution to happen and the Gulag to be born and thrive. The people of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union had to be somehow especially vulnerable to evil—or they would not have succumbed to it to such an unimaginable degree.

Within the motif structure of *The Gulag Archipelago* we see a clear Biblical connection: all former life was utterly and irrevocably lost (including the Solovki herring) because the people had fallen. The presence of a mortal sin in the foundations of the Soviet Union cannot be doubted (at least, in the narrator's view), because the people whose language and philosophy had been carefully recorded by Vladimir Dal' could have never built—or populated—the Gulag Archipelago. Something must have happened to make them commit this evil, to submit to this evil. This is a question that Solzhenitsyn would keep returning to.

Consequently, within the limits of the text, the hell of Soviet life could never be truly broken until the nation and its people, every single person, repented and could be restored. With no extenuating circumstances or external pressure (unless the country became something it had never been before—a nation of conscious heroes and saints) the Gulag had been possible, and still was.

And hence *The Gulag Archipelago's* strange relationship with Russian history:

a) on one level, the idyllic image of the pre-Revolutionary Russia serves as a symbol of the paradise lost, but;
b) on another it supports the sad conclusion that even such a reasonable society is not Gulag-proof, until its people make it so by individually triumphing over their inner evil;
c) on a third level, it exists as a vessel for the values and virtues whose very lack built the Gulag.

49 Ibid., 641.

This means that, within the book as such, it does not matter whether Nicholas I offered mercy to the common soldiers or not. It does not matter whether Russia was really the land of justice and plenty. What matters is that in the new world, "mercy" became not a virtue (whether falsely claimed or not), but a sin. Injustice became a proclaimed legal standard, and famine an acceptable method of class struggle.

The perfect Kitezh-of-the-past might never have existed at all—but after the *Archipelago* no one could deny that the Gulag had. The old society might not have been a verifiable paradise, but those who rejected it built for themselves and many others a highly verifiable hell.

So, on a certain level *The Gulag Archipelago* is positioned not as a history of an institution or of a country, but as an anti-history. It is a non-negotiable demonstration that if the Gulag Archipelago was real (and it was), if the society surrounding it was indeed the kind of society that would build and use such a thing (as it did), if that evil could not be called by its proper name to the very day *The Gulag Archipelago* was published[50] (and it could not)—then the October Revolution that produced it could be no other than a fatally wrong turn in the country's history. Indeed, it was something more sinister than that: a past that had to be recreated and recognized, only to be rejected and erased.

On that level *The Gulag Archipelago* can be seen not as a Braudelian historical landscape, but as a Dantesque utopia—a masterful vision of Hell that by its very existence attests to the necessity and possibility of Heaven.

Within a semantic structure of that magnitude, the actual name of an obscure committee would not matter, even to those who oppose such a vision. After all, we do not expect Dante Alighieri to be correct in every detail when describing Italy—or the Inferno.

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CHAPTER 10

Telling the Stories of Others and Writing the Bodies of Others: The Representation of Women in Shalamov's *Kolyma Stories* and Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*

Josefina Lundblad-Janjić

1 Introduction

"The attitude toward women is the litmus test of any ethics," Varlam Shalamov writes in "Zhenshchina blatnogo mira" (Woman of the Thieves' World) from *Ocherki prestupnogo mira* (Sketches of the Criminal World),[1] the fourth of his six cycles of *Kolymskie rasskazy* (Kolyma Stories).[2] The litmus test, where a single factor is decisive, is here used to explore women as a marginalized yet meaningful part of the criminal world. In fact, women constitute only a minor presence in Shalamov's *Kolyma Stories*, which are told from the perspective of a male narrator. In this way, the representation of women might become a litmus test for his ethics as well as aesthetics, thus shedding light on an otherwise often overlooked aspect.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn expands Shalamov's approach to women among criminal convicts with an observation that concerns all women in the Gulag: "Nothing is equal in life in general, and in the camp especially."[3] This comes from the chapter "Zhenshchina v lagere" (Woman in the Camp) in *Arkhipelag Gulag* (The Gulag Archipelago), which, together with Shalamov's chapter, concerns what is often absent in their camp prose: female prisoners. These two chapters are limited in their scope, but they stand out as significant attempts

1 "Отношение к женщине – лакмусовая бумажка всякой этики." Varlam Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii* [Collected works], vol. 2 (Moscow: 2013), 52. Unless indicated otherwise, all translations from the Russian are my own.

2 In the title of Shalamov's chapter, I translate the adjective "blatnoi" as "thieves" to reflect the hierarchy among criminal convicts, with the thief at the top. Throughout this chapter, "blatnoi" as well as "blatar'" is translated as "thief" whereas "criminal" is used as a general term referring to convicts not sentenced for political reasons.

3 "Ничто не равно в жизни вообще, а в лагере тем более." Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh* [Collected Works in Thirty Volumes], vol. 5 (Moscow: 2013), 186.

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to do something rarely done elsewhere in the works of Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn: to embody experiences they did not have, but felt were crucial to their literary testimony. The chapters specifically concerning female prisoners highlight the multifaceted relationship involving the witness, the text, and the stories as well as bodies of others.

The Gulag camps held prisoners diverse in national origin, ethnic background, religious creed, penal charges, and gender. Here I focus on one group of "others"—women. I trace their representation in Solzhenitsyn's "Woman in the Camp" and Shalamov's "Woman of the Thieves' World" and provide a counterpoint in their depictions of the same female survivor of the Gulag: Natal'ia Stoliarova, whom they both knew personally. Telling the stories of others is a precarious endeavor. Testimony—which is rarely the story of one—thus inhabits a contested territory. In testimony, bodies and stories of others collide with the personal experience and literary strategy of the witness-turned-writer; subsequently, to investigate this collision through the representation of women by Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov is a way of reading their texts in a different light.

To read the works of Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov from a gendered perspective is to make a space for one of the "interpretive communities" which Leona Toker argues may be sensitive to various aspects of *The Gulag Archipelago*.[4] To be "sensitive" is not necessarily to be triggered, but rather to create a space in which to think more thoroughly about the implicit claims made by certain texts. My approach to their representation of women responds to Toker and follows the path of rethinking Gulag narratives proposed by Adi Kuntsman:

> [G]ulag scholarship as a field must face its own lacunae, provide a more careful and informed reading of the memoirs' silences, and question the very formations of humanness in the memoirs. Unpacking the relations between sexuality, class, and humanness is central here, for it is the category of the human that constitutes historical subjecthood, a life worth understanding and remembering.[5]

My aim is not primarily to analyze hitherto unnoticed content, although gender in Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn is indeed understudied.[6] Rather, I

4 Leona Toker, *Return from the Archipelago: Narratives of Gulag Survivors* (Bloomington: 2000), 122. Toker relates this to anti-Semitism; however, this sensitivity can also be applied to gender.

5 Adi Kuntsman, "'With a Shade of Disgust': Affective Politics of Sexuality and Class in Memoirs of the Stalinist Gulag," *Slavic Review* 68, no. 2 (Summer 2009), 328.

6 My chapter is indebted to the approach in Frantsishek Apanovich, "Na nizshei stupeni unizheniia (Obraz zhenshchiny v tvorchestve V. T. Shalamova)" [At the Lowest Stage of

consider one aspect of the "formation of humanness" in their works about the Gulag. *The Gulag Archipelago* and *Kolyma Stories* are not memoirs in the generic sense of, for example, Evgeniia Ginzburg's *Krutoi marshrut* (Into/Within the Whirlwind), which depicts the Gulag from a woman's perspective. Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn's texts share with Ginzburg's work an explicit focus on lives "worth understanding and remembering." Yet unlike them, Ginzburg did not include a chapter specifically about male prisoners. To read their chapters on women is to explore how their portrayal of the female experience relates to that which merits understanding and remembrance, as well as how the humanness of women is depicted in an environment shaped by dehumanization.

2 Shalamov's "Woman of the Thieves' World"

Sketches from the Criminal World differs from Shalamov's other prose cycles: it is aimed at combatting the misrepresentation of criminals in Russian and Soviet literature and is thus limited to their culture and codes of behavior.[7] One of his more provocative claims in this cycle concerns humanness, or rather its negation: "…in the thief there is nothing human."[8] However, "Woman of the Thieves' World" shows that one segment among them retained a sense of humanity. Shalamov's narrator centers his representation of these women on their position not only in the Gulag but as also as members of and participants in a misogynistic male-dominated group. His narrator acknowledges their ubiquitous objectification among their own and shields several of the women he represents from being seen as mainly female bodies. The first woman in the chapter, Aglaia Demidova, is removed from the hospital that refused to admit her before the boss gets a chance to look at her:

> – Where is she? This Demidova?

Humiliation (The Image of the Woman in the Work of V. T. Shalamov)], in I. P. Sirotinskaia, *K stoletiiu so dnia rozhdeniia Varlama Shalamova: materialy mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii* [On the Centenary of the Birth of Varlam Shalamov: Materials of the International Scientific Conference] (Moscow: 2007), 33–39; Xenia Gasiorowska, "Solzhenitsyn's Women," in *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: Critical Essays and Documentary Materials*, ed. Richard S. Haugh, Alexis Klimoff, and John B. Dunlop (New York: 1975), 118–128. Gazirowska does not include *The Gulag Archipelago* in her article.

7 For a discussion of this cycle through the lens of Solzhenitsyn's approach to criminal convicts, see Mikhail Ryklin, "'Prokliatyi orden.' Shalamov, Solzhenitsyn i blatnye" [The damned order. 'Shalamov, Solzhenitsyn and the thieves], accessed July 10, 2018, https://shalamov.ru/research/9/.

8 "…в блатаре и нет ничего человеческого." Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, 21.

> – She's already been taken away, citizen chief.
> – What a pity, what a pity that I didn't look at her. … The boss wanted at least to have a peek at the famous thief Demidova—her story is in fact not quite ordinary.
>
> – А где она? Эта Демидова?
> – Уже увезли, гражданин начальник.
> – Жаль, жаль, что я ее не посмотрел. … Начальнику хотелось взглянуть хоть одним глазком на знаменитую воровку Демидову – история ее и в самом деле не совсем обыкновенная.[9]

In the same protective move that spares Demidova the male gaze of the hospital boss, Shalamov's narrator stops her body from appearing before the reader. In another short story from *Kolyma Stories*, "Uroki liubvi" (Lessons in Love), which also features several women, we note a similar move in its ending. The story of Stefa, a survivor of Auschwitz and a current inmate in Kolyma, is included, but the narrator's consensual intimate relationship with her is excluded. Their relationship is consummated in a short sketch called "On the 23rd Kilometer" from his late autobiographical text *About Kolyma*, but her body is reduced to her eyes and hands. Fabian Heffermehl has noted that descriptions of faces in *Kolyma Stories* are substituted by tangible objects (for example, a glove)—which resonates with both the touching of Stefa in "Lessons in Love" as well as the omission of Demidova's body in this moment: she is not an object to be looked at, but the subject of a story shaped by agency and integrity.[10] Originally sentenced to ten years for suffocating a female clerk, she had recently acquired another sentence of twenty-five years. The second crime was committed during a transfer when the guard escorting her assumed that the presence of a woman equaled access to her body: "It wasn't the first time he convoyed a woman—such a trip always promised well-known entertainments, which not too often fall to the share of an ordinary rifleman in the North."[11] Demidova resists the assault and achieves her revenge through murder. Demidova's body was out of bounds because of her elevated status

9 Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, 42.

10 Fabian Heffermehl, "Problema nerukotvornosti i mnemotekhniki Gulaga," [The problem of acheiropoieta and mnemotechnics of the Gulag], in *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach*, vol. 76 (2015), 215–245.

11 "Не в первый раз сопровождал он бабу – всегда такая поездка сулила известные развлечения, какие не слишком часто выпадают на долю рядового стрелка на Севере." Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, 42.

in the criminal world: she was a "vorovka," a female thief. For all this guard's savvy, he was oblivious to the differences between the two groups of women in the criminal world. Demidova belonged to the first: the privileged group of female thieves.

The female thief occupies a position of agency and authority. The story of Demidova is presented as exceptional, but her resistance to sexual violence demonstrates an essential difference between women within this society. Sex is the profession belonging to the second, much larger, group: the prostitutes. This ratio imbalance seems to be explained through the misogyny that shapes their worldview: "An inferior being, woman was created only to satiate the thief's animal passion, to be the target of his gross jokes and the subject of public beatings when the thief 'parties.' A living thing that the thief uses temporarily."[12] However, the prostitute is not presented as a passive object. Her identification with her profession appears as an active service, and sex provides her with a kind of agency despite the danger involved. Whatever her punishment from the camp authorities, "…she tolerates all this without resentment and even proudly—she's fulfilled her prostitute's duty."[13] Although Shalamov's narrator seems uncertain about the true nature of the prostitute—is she a subject of female empowerment or an object for male desire?—she is depicted as a woman for whom sex is a professional calling. Moreover, prostitutes are sometimes difficult to identify in *Kolyma Stories*. A woman who addresses a group of prisoners with the ambiguous "soon enough, guys, soon!"[14] in "Dozhd'" (Rain) is inferred by the narrator to be a prostitute; but in another short story, "Pervaia smert'" (The First Death), the same woman is found dead and both reclaims her name—Anna Pavlovna—and her social status as a secretary for the camp boss.

Anna Pavlovna did not belong to the criminal world after all, but her sudden death indicates the precarious situation for all women in the camp. When it comes to the functions of criminal women, Shalamov's chapter emphasizes their inherent inequality. Whereas prostitutes could have relationships with men outside the criminal world, female thieves were held to a higher standard: "A female thief who lives with a guard commits treason, according the

12 "Существо низшее, женщина создана лишь затем, чтобы насытить животную страсть вора, быть мишенью его грубых шуток и предметом публичных побоев, когда блатарь 'гуляет.' Живая вещь, которую блатарь берет во временное пользование." Ibid., 44.

13 "…все это она переносит безропотно и даже гордо, – она выполнила свой проституточий долг." Ibid., 45.

14 "Скоро уже, ребята, скоро!" Ibid., vol. 1, 69.

thief dogmatists. To point out her mistake, she may be beaten or her throat cut just like that, like a 'bitch.'"[15] The story of Tamara Tsulukidze is presented as an example. She fell in love with the head of the cultural and educational unit, Grachev, who had also another female partner, Leshchevskaia. The two women were not friends, and when the criminal world eventually came to claim Tsulukidze, "…Leshchevskaia secretly gloated."[16] However, the story of Tsulukidze does not end with her return to the fold. Instead, it becomes another example of a woman with agency. She defends her body against the violent retribution of the men to whom she ostensibly belonged and opts for another way of life: "Tamara was hit with a knife, but the wound was trivial. The end of her sentence came and she married some warden—a man with a revolver, and the thieves' world didn't get her anyway."[17]

The seemingly happy ending for Tsulukidze is contrasted with the story of the "blue-eyed" Nastia Arkharova, who was neither a thief nor a prostitute but was caught up in the criminal world due to her brother's profession. In the camp, she found herself without his protection and was forced into one intimate relationship after another. When offered a way out, she declines in favor of her role in the criminal world: "'It's not up to me,' Nastia wrote in beautiful handwriting in her answer to the doctor. 'I cannot be saved. But if you want to do something nice for me, then buy me nylon stockings in the smallest size. *Ready for anything for you, Nastia Arkharova*.'"[18] In rejecting the offer of a way out, she simultaneously rejects a different narrative for herself. Shalamov's narrator responds, as it were, by not representing her body. The pair of stockings requested appears as a synecdoche for a diminutive female body that neither could nor would resist sexual advances. The story of Arkharova is then contrasted with the story of Sima Sosnovskaia, a female thief, whose body represents the intimacy both she and her partners enjoy: "Amazing intertwined sexual scenes of the most sophisticated content covered her whole body with very intricate lines. Only the face, neck and arms up to the elbows were without

15 "Воровка, живущая с надзирателем, совершает измену, по мнению блатных начетчиков. Ее могут избить, указывая на ее ошибку, а то и просто прирезать, как 'суку.'" Ibid., vol. 2, 45.

16 "…Лещевская втайне злорадствовала." Ibid., 48.

17 "Тамару ударили ножом, но рана была пустяковой. Пришел конец срока наказания, и она вышла замуж за какого-то надзирателя – за человека с револьвером, а блатному миру она так и не досталась." Ibid.

18 "Это не в моей воле, – писала красивым почерком Настя, отвечая врачу. – Меня не спасти. А если вам хочется сделать мне что-нибудь хорошее, то купите мне чулки капроновые самого маленького размера. Готовая для вас на все Настя Архарова." Ibid., 49.

tattoos."[19] Sosnovskaia's story resembles that of Demidova in that she too struggled against an attempted rape by a guard. Unlike Demidova, she did not kill him but stole his watch as "…not a very expensive price for her love."[20]

Although lucky in the events depicted in "Woman of the Thieves' World," female thieves like Sosnovskaia and Demidova fought a losing battle among their own. The relationship a thief had with any woman was inevitably steeped in misogyny: "Woman is a despicable, inferior creature worthy of beating, unworthy of compassion."[21] Thus, rape appears as the only way for a male criminal to engage with a woman: "He beats his prostitute-girlfriend so often that she stops, they say, feeling love in all its fullness, if for some reason she doesn't get another beating."[22] Here Shalamov's narrator makes a brief acknowledgement of what is emblematic not only of the female experience in the camps, but also of the bodies of all the prisoners, as it lost both its appealing exterior and its internal sensitivity.

However, there is one woman whom the thief may neither assault nor disrespect: his mother. Although this devotion might appear to be a rare display of humanity, the chapter undercuts this interpretation: "The cult of the mother that is not transferred to his wife and to woman in general is a falsehood and a lie."[23] However, the narrator insists, the criminal world is built on double standards like this one. The thieves, unlike their women, were encouraged to enter into relationships with women beyond their world: "It is an honor and a valor, the subject of boastful stories for one man and the secret envy of many."[24] On that note of inequality, "Woman of the Thieves' World" ends with the continuation of the family line for the thieves who choose to marry—his wife might be free, a political convict, a prostitute, or a female thief. Her initial role in society is not as important as the role she will have in raising the next

19 "Удивительные, переплетающиеся между собой сексуальные сцены самого мудреного содержания весьма затейливыми линиями покрывали все ее тело. Только лицо, шея и руки до локтя были без наколок." Ibid. For more about the meaning of tattoos among Russian criminals, see Danzig Baldayev, Sergey Vasiliev, and Miles M. Sorrell, *Russian Criminal Tattoo Encyclopedia* (Göttingen: 2003).

20 "…не слишком дорогая цена за ее любовь." Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, 49–50.

21 "Женщина – существо презренное, низшее, достойное побоев, недостойное жалости." Ibid., 50.

22 "Проститутку-подругу он бьет настолько часто, что та перестает, говорят, чувствовать любовь во всей ее полноте, если почему-либо она не получит очередных побоев." Ibid.

23 "Культ матери, не перенесенный на жену и на женщину вообще, – фальшь и ложь." Ibid., 52.

24 "Это – честь и доблесть, предмет хвастливых рассказов одного и тайной зависти многих." Ibid.

generation. Thus, the life of women in the criminal world comes full circle according to the father's wish: "The thief imagines the future of daughters (if they exist somewhere) to be perfectly normal as career prostitutes, the girlfriend of some notorious thief."[25]

Throughout the chapter, Shalamov's narrator aspires to restore humanness to one part of a group that he as a whole deems to be beyond human. Within this group, women are routinely assaulted and victims of an institutionalized misogyny. He seeks to inspire compassion for them and, although some of them committed crimes for which they were sentenced and served time, most of the crimes he mentions concern self-protection from rape. Such crimes are presented as justifiable and thus not strictly immoral or illegal. He tries to shield their bodies from the male gaze, but the gendered objectification they face amongst their own appears reproduced by how their individual stories are framed as general tendencies among thieves.

This could be an attempt to produce authentic testimony and to perform, rather than represent, the circumstances of these women.[26] However, in this attempt there seems to be a presumption that these women could not tell their own stories. Most likely, the women in "Woman in the Thieves' World" did not narrate their own lives or become readers of Shalamov's cycle—unlike in the case of Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*. Although Shalamov's initial motive was to raise social awareness, the chapter contains an unresolvable tension between this motive and the superimposition of his perspective on the stories of socially disadvantaged women, with whom he has nothing in common except imprisonment.

3 Solzhenitsyn's "Woman in the Camp"

Solzhenitsyn shared the social context of many of the women in "Woman in the Camp." *The Gulag Archipelago* was read by some of them, and it has been suggested that the anthology of women's Gulag testimonies, *Dodnes' tiagoteet* (Till My Tale Is Told), published in 1989, was a response to Solzhenitsyn,

25 "Будущее дочерей (если они где-нибудь есть) представляется вору совершенно нормальным в карьере проститутки, подруги какого-либо знатного вора." Ibid., 52–53.

26 For more about performativity, see Franzizka Thun-Hohenstein, "Rabota Varlama Shalamova nad poetikoi operativnosti" [Varlam Shalamov's work on the poetics of efficiency], in *Varlam Shalamov v kontekste mirovoi literatury i sovetskoi istorii*, ed. Valerii Esipov and Sergei Solov'ev (Moscow: 2013), 111–119.

since "some of the women felt that their experiences had been misrepresented"[27] by him. Four of them—Olga Adamova-Sliozberg, Nadezhda Grankina, Tatiana Leshchenko-Sukhomlina, and Nadezhda Surovtseva—are among the 227 "witnesses of the archipelago."[28] This list bears the device of *The Gulag Archipelago*, as the stories of others are indispensable to the text. It also reveals that of the 227 witnesses, 66 are women, which would mean that more than one in four of Solzhenitsyn's witnesses were female. Women appear throughout the work, which makes the chapter that he devotes solely to them a peculiar feature of his narrative strategies. Additionally, it is unclear if all 227 witnesses wanted their names in *The Gulag Archipelago*; Shalamov, for example, did not give names.[29] Despite this, Solzhenitsyn refers to Shalamov, implicitly as well as explicitly, throughout the second volume in which "Woman in the Camp" is included. Valerii Esipov argues that Solzhenitsyn borrowed a term from *Sketches of the Criminal World* for his chapter on criminal convicts, "Socially-close"[30] (used to denote the affinity of criminals with the working class).

However, Solzhenitsyn appears not to have used Shalamov's "Woman of the Thieves' World" for his chapter on women, which suggests that his approach is different. His representation of women is more comprehensive and diverse than Shalamov's chapter on criminal women, yet this also presents a gendered reading with the potential to disrupt previous notions of the "absolute truth" implicit in *The Gulag Archipelago*.[31] Solzhenitsyn emphasizes the female body

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27 John Crowfoot, "Afterword," in *Till My Tale Is Told: Women's Memoirs of the Gulag*, ed. Simeon Vilenskii (Bloomington: 2001), 337.

28 Solzhenitsyn, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 4, 14–20.

29 See a note from Shalamov's notebook, dated 1968: "Через Храбровицкого сообщил Солженицыну, что я не разрешаю использовать ни один факт из моих работ для его работ." (5: 302). [Through Khrabrovitskii I informed Solzhenitsyn that I do not authorize the use of a single fact from my works for his work.] Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, 302.

30 Valerii Esipov, "V. Shalamov i 'Arkhipelag Gulag' A. Solzhenitsyna" [V. Shalamov and A. Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*], in *Shalamovskii sbornik 5* (Vologda: 2017), 282–333 (especially the section "Variatsiia ili plagiat?" 323–330).

31 "However, two further factors enhanced his reputation in such a way that Solzhenitsyn's works were transformed from being 'literary truth' to being 'the absolute truth': his tenacity upon is persecution by the Soviet state in the 1970s and his literary talent. Thus, the infallibility of *Gulag* was the result of a combination of literary and extra-textual factors of its time. However, most of these contingent factors should pose no hindrance to a later reassessment of this work. Even if one does not categorize *Gulag* as history, why did the author present female desire and sexual violence in his diegesis in such a way? In this sense, a study of the image of women in his works would be beneficial and

not only in terms of biological difference, but also as a marker of truth for the difference in how women were perceived and came to perceive themselves.

Solzhenitsyn combines his own perception, based on his personal experience in the camps, with how women saw themselves in their own narratives: "And what amazes me in women's memoirs is precisely this: what 'trifles' from the point of view of a convict (but by no means a woman) they could think about while [in prison]."[32] The "trifles" that occupied women's minds during interrogation in prison concerned their bodies. The interrogators scrutinized not only their supposedly illegal behavior but also their physical appearance. Solzhenitsyn's narrator is baffled as to why the first woman named in the chapter, Surovtseva, was bothered by the interrogator's looking at her mismatched stockings. But Surovtseva is being looked at by the narrator in *The Gulag Archipelago* too—he notes that she was "beautiful and still young." Her discomfort at this recognition seems to him unworthy of someone who was "almost a doctor of philosophy."[33] Similar professional achievements are seldom mentioned in relation to the women discussed; however, many of them, like Surovtseva, felt a similar objectification based on their gender and were forced to adapt to the male gaze while in the camps.

The female experience in "Woman in the Camp" appears primarily to be the experience of the female body. Solzhenitsyn's narrator points to physical differences to emphasize how the sexes endured the same circumstances: "The equal-for-all prison rations and the test of prison are, on average, easier for women. They do not pass away so fast from hunger."[34] The objectification women encountered from the male prison staff seems to be a "trifle" when compared with how the female body requires less nourishment than the male. The camp restores a sense of equality as the narrator observes: "In the camp, on the other hand, it is harder for women than us."[35] Yet the tougher reality for women in the camps might be beyond comparison, as the role allotted the female body strips the individual of her humanness. This becomes apparent in

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indeed indispensable to his future readers." Kriza, Elisa, *Alexander Solzhenitsyn: Cold War Icon, Gulag Author, Russian Nationalist?: A Study of the Western Reception of His Literary Writings, Historical Interpretations, and Political Ideas* (Stuttgart: 2014), 186.

32 "А меня в женских воспоминаниях о следствии поражает именно: о каких 'пустяках' с точки зрения арестантской (но отнюдь не женской) они могли там думать." Solzhenitsyn, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, 179.

33 "Надя Суровцева, красивая и ещё молодая, … к тому ж она едва ль не доктор (по-западному) философии…" Ibid.

34 "Равная для всех тюремная пайка и тюремные испытания оказываются для женщин в среднем легче. Они не сдают так быстро от голода." Ibid., 180.

35 "В лагере, напротив, женщине всё тяжелее, чем нам." Ibid.

the greeting of new female inmates: "In the camp bathhouse the naked women are viewed as a commodity."[36] This initiation sets the harsh tone not only for the female experience in the Gulag but also for its physical representation in this chapter. In prison, the female body is observed because it is seen as attractive; in the camps, the attractive female body becomes an object for desire and commerce. The chapter's overt focus on this aspect in some ways transforms the Gulag and repeats the transformation of the hospital in *Rakovyi korpus* (The Cancer Ward) from "a place of maimed and dying bodies" to "a locus of love and desire."[37]

Moreover, this initiation echoes what Kostoglotov says to Zoya, one of his love-interests in the novel, about the way in which a woman enters the camp for the first time. The outcome of a fortunate exchange between a newly arrived woman and a man in the camp could mean the difference between life and death. The chapter uses the story of two prisoners, the female M. and Isaak Bershader, to show the trading value of a physically appealing female body. She "looked like a princess from a fairy tale: with crimson lips, the posture of a swan, a long sheet of glossy raven hair,"[38] whereas "[h]e was disgusting to look at in general."[39] Bershader sought to "buy" her and used his power in the camp as a storekeeper to coerce her into an intimate relationship. Solzhenitsyn witnessed her eventual resignation in favor of a better life:

> And one evening, when the light went out in the camp, I happened to see myself in the pale dusk from snow and sky, how M. walked as a shadow from the women's barracks and, with her head down, knocked on the door of the avaricious Bershader. After that, her life was arranged well in the zone.
>
> И однажды вечером, когда в лагере погас свет, мне довелось самому увидеть в бледном сумраке от снега и неба, как М. прошла тенью от женского барака и с опущенной головой постучала в каптёрку алчного Бершадера. После этого она хорошо была устроена в зоне.[40]

36 "В лагерной-то бане и разглядывают раздетых женщин как товар." Ibid.

37 Tempest, Richard, *Overwriting Chaos: Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's Fictive Worlds* (Boston, 2019), 260.

38 "…как царевна из сказки—губы пунцовые, осанка лебяжья, волосы вороновым крылом." Ibid., 182.

39 "Он был и вообще отвратителен на взгляд." Ibid., 182–183.

40 Ibid., 183.

This is a story about a woman who resorted to becoming the lover of a man. Yet it is also a story about how "Woman in the Camp" represents the fates of women. Although such a relationship may have been introduced to underscore the inequality of similar exchanges between men and women, M. remains an object for the narrator's male gaze, much as she was an object for her admirer. The detailed depiction of her appearance is gendered, but both the beautiful woman and the ugly man are "othered" to suggest that their individual stories are less meaningful than the overarching aim of *The Gulag Archipelago*. In the name of testimony, the "others" must somehow remain malleable and mute.

The voices of women cited in "Woman in the Camp" are few—I would argue that the chapter features only one speaking woman[41]—but an implied female narrator is often evoked: "Establish yourself, establish yourself, honey, in the zone while they're offering in a gentlemanly manner. Cleanliness and laundry, and decent clothes, and tireless work—all this is yours."[42] It is unclear who this implied female narrator might be; what seems clear is that a female prisoner should prefer prostitution on her own terms to rape. During his discussion of the trading value of the female body, the narrator changes his mind and declares that it was easier for women in the camp after all. The female body is not only easier to feed, but also easier to sell. Prostitution, as well as several situations typical for women, is shown through a woman's eyes. In this way, prostitution appears as a meaningful way for this generic woman to spend her years incarcerated: "You'll coarsen, get old, your last female years will be sad and empty. Is it not wiser to hurry and take something from this wild life?"[43] Not only does the life of a woman in the camp become meaningful through heterosexual intercourse, her entire existence there seems saturated with sex.

If a female prisoner happens to be beautiful, sex might be on her own terms, but only if she plays her cards well. If she hesitates at first, the chapter asserts that she will eventually resort to selling her body in exchange for bread, in an image that is as crude as it is harrowing: "But she who waits longer—she'll have to trudge by herself into the common male barracks, no longer wanted by the camp assholes, walking between the bunks repeating monotonously:

41 The thoughts of Sachkova are quoted and she thus appears as a subject rather than object. Ibid., 186–187.

42 "Устраивайся, устраивайся, милая, в зоне, пока предлагают по-джентльменски. И чистота, и стирка, и приличная одежда, и неутомительная работа—всё твоё." Ibid., 181.

43 "Ты грубеешь, стареешь, безрадостно и пусто пройдут последние женские годы. Не разумнее ли что-то спешить взять и от этой дикой жизни?" Ibid., 182.

'Half a kilo… half a kilo…'"[44] Even if she opts out of voluntary prostitution, sex is inescapable. The danger of rape looms large over the body that remains an object of desire against her will: "Only obvious old age or obvious deformity was the protection of a woman—and nothing more."[45]

Although it might be assumed that it would have been easier for women in camps without men, the chapter informs us of the opposite. In women-only camps, the inmates could no longer make advantageous exchanges with men in the hope of receiving a physically less demanding job. Even in the all-female camps, their bodies were noticed The narrator of *The Gulag Archipelago* notes that a healthy female body becomes deformed from the type of masculine work it must perform in women's camps, and provides a detailed description of such a body:

> …she's become ageless; her shoulders protrude like sharp corners, her breasts hang like dried-up pouches; excess skin folds frown on flat buttocks, there is so little flesh above the knees that a gap is formed, through which a sheep's head can fit and even a soccer ball; her voice is rough, hoarse, and the sunburn of pellagra is already appearing on her face.
>
> …она стала безвозрастна; плечи её выступают острыми углами, груди повисли иссохшими мешочками; избыточные складки кожи морщатся на плоских ягодицах, над коленями так мало плоти, что образовался просвет, куда овечья голова пройдёт и даже футбольный мяч; голос погрубел, охрип, а на лицо уже находит загар пеллагры.[46]

This image shows a body separated from its story—she is given no name or other identifiable traits—and provides a stark contrast to the other female bodies in the chapter, such as that of M. The emphasis on particular features also echoes other representations of female bodies in the works of Solzhenitsyn, in which "certain parts of the female body, most commonly the breasts and the lips, attract heightened attention."[47] However, work and physical

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44 "А кто прождёт дольше-то самой ещё придётся плестись в общий мужской барак, уже не к придуркам, идти в проходе между вагонками и однообразно повторять: 'Полкило… полкило…'" Ibid., 183.

45 "Только явная старость или явное уродство были защитой женщины – и больше ничто." Ibid., 184.

46 Ibid., 185–186.

47 Urmanov, Aleksandr, "Kontseptsiia Erosa v tvorchestve A. Solzenitsyna," in *Mezhdy dvumia iubileiami (1998–2003): pisateli, kritiki, literaturovedy o tvorchestve A. I. Solzhenitsyna*, ed. N. A. Struve and V. A. Moskvin (Moscow: 2005), 378.

depletion from work is only one part of the female experience in segregated camps. Without access to heterosexual intercourse, the chapter notes, they could no longer use the occasional pregnancy to relieve them of forced labor. A healthy pregnancy could be the difference between life and death: "To escape from the forced manual labor even temporarily became the salvation of life. And women began to chase after pregnancy, began to search for it from every fleeting encounter, every touch."[48] The narrator notes that the number of children born in the Gulag doubled after male and female prisoners were separated. Sex and its trade value, the chapter implies, was insufficient to ease their incarceration; they attempted to conceive to further ameliorate their situation.

However, bearing children seems not to have been enough for female prisoners; they wanted love as well. Both female and male prisoners, the narrator contends, could find heterosexual love in the camps. In *The Gulag Archipelago*, love appears best when detached from the body:

> By the blessing of God, a love arose that was almost no longer carnal, because it is was embarrassing in the bushes, impossible in front of everyone in the barracks, and the man is not always capable, and the camp surveillance drags them out of any stash (seclusion) and puts them in the punishment cell.
>
> Благословением Божьим возникала любовь почти уже не плотская, потому что в кустах стыдно, в бараке при всех невозможно, да и мужчина не всегда в силе, да и лагерный надзор изо всякой заначки (уединения) таскает и сажает в карцер.[49]

This bodiless love provides a rare moment of emotional elevation for both the narrator and the women he depicts. Furthermore, it gestures toward a profound need for the prisoners to create a private realm within the camp through which to assert themselves above all as human beings. What women wanted—Solzhenitsyn's narrator insists—was love. In a chapter that rarely differentiates between individual female prisoners, he admits when it came to love, there were indeed two kinds: "Some became concubines for the camp assholes without love—to be saved; and some submitted to forced labor and

48 "Вырваться с общих хотя бы на время стало спасением жизни. И женщины стали гоняться за беременностью, стали ловить её от любой мимолётной встречи, любого касания." Ibid., 194.

49 Ibid., 188.

perished—for love."[50] Additionally, women in all-female camps could be further divided into two groups because the gender division in the Gulag caused not only segregation but also degradation. In response to the walls between male and female zones, love became divided between these two groups: "…Eros tossed about. Not finding other spheres, he went either too high—into platonic correspondence, or too low—into same-sex love."[51] Solzhenitsyn's narrator regards the "too high" type as morally preferable:

> In the same Kengir camp, Lithuanian women got married through the wall to fellow countrymen whom they had never known before: the Roman Catholic priest (in the same pea coat, of course, as he was one of the prisoners) testified in writing that such and such had been united forever in front of Heaven. In this connection with an unknown prisoner behind the wall—and for Catholics the connection was irreversible and sacred—I hear a choir of angels.
>
> В том же Кенгире литовки выходили замуж через стену за земляков, никогда прежде их не знав: ксёндз (в таком же бушлате, конечно, из заключённых) свидетельствовал письменно, что такая-то и такой-то навеки соединены перед небом. В этом соединении с незнакомым узником за стеной—а для католичек соединение было необратимо и священно—мне слышится хор ангелов.[52]

The otherworldly power of such matrimonial unions appears also to be a defense against the ubiquitous prostitution and threats of rape surrounding the female body in the camps. Here, as well as elsewhere in the chapter, Solzhenitsyn's narrator emphasizes the importance for women of preserving and nurturing their feelings in a space that sought to annihilate any sense of the private, the personal, the individual. In this and other examples of love, humanness disrupts both the Gulag and *The Gulag Archipelago*.

With or without men, the female experience in the chapter appears drenched in the unceasing quest for sex, love, intimate relationships—simply for a private life. The narrator offers few insights into other aspects of women's

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50 "Кто-то шёл содержанками придурков без любви – чтобы спастись, а кто-то шёл на общие и гиб – за любовь." Ibid., 189.

51 "…Эрос метался. Не находя других сфер, он уходил или слишком высоко – в платоническую переписку, или слишком низко – в однополую любовь." Ibid., 195.

52 Ibid.

lives in the camps beyond what happens to their bodies—voluntarily or involuntarily. Women and their stories feature throughout *The Gulag Archipelago*, but "Woman in The Camp" serves indirectly to contain their bodies within the work itself. In the chapter dedicated solely to them, the body becomes the story, and the status of women is defined by difference and otherness. For example, the narrator places the female other in a separate category when illustrating the destructive influence of the camps: "…but not five years, even five weeks [there] is enough to destroy both a woman and a human being."[53] The compartmentalization of women in this chapter suggests a partial representation of the female experience in *The Gulag Archipelago* that, in its turn, suggests not an "absolute truth" but rather a partial truth within the work as a whole.

4 Stoliarova in Solzhenitsyn's and Shalamov's Works

A truth of a different magnitude concerns the representations of Stoliarova by both Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov. Solzhenitsyn wrote about her in a sketch that became supplementary material to his literary autobiography *Bodal'sia telenok s dubom* (The Oak and The Calf); she was one of the "invisible helpers" (*nevidimki*) who facilitated the publication of *The Gulag Archipelago* abroad. According to materials collected by KGB, it was Shalamov who introduced Solzhenitsyn to Stoliarova in his home in 1962.[54] She was the secretary of Ilya Ehrenburg at the time and later kept the manuscript of *The Gulag Archipelago* in Ehrenburg's apartment. Whereas Solzhenitsyn attempted to convey the truth of his relationship with Stoliarova in his sketch, Shalamov opted for a fictional take on her and on her mother Natal'ia Klimova in "Zolotaia medal'" (The Gold Medal). Stolyarova read both texts about her; she seems to have accepted Solzhenitsyn's, but objected to that of Shalamov.[55] Solzhenitsyn focused on the personal connection he had with Stoliarova, and depicted how they gradually became close through the unifying mission of attracting a broad readership for *The Gulag Archipelago*. She found a way to send the

53 "…ведь не пяти лет, а пяти недель довольно, чтоб уничтожить и женщину и человека." Ibid., 187.

54 Dmitrii Nich, *Moskovskii rasskaz. Zhizneopisanie Varlama Shalamova. 1960–80-ie gody*. [A Moscow story. A Biography of Varlam Shalamov. 1960–1980s], Lichnoe izdanie (2011), 42.

55 Aleksandr Solzenitsyn, *Bodalsya telenok s dubom: ocherki literaturnoi zhizni* [The Oak and the Calf: Sketches of a Literary Life] (Moscow: 1996), 507.

manuscript abroad, and Solzhenitsyn compared this literary "bomb" sent by Stoliarova to the bomb that Klimova had carried sixty years earlier in Saint Petersburg.[56] His representation of her has little in common with his previous chapter on women in the Gulag, although he cites her in it; instead, she is presented as a person who facilitated an important milestone for him as a writer. Comparing the actions of mother and daughter, he writes: "All the forces of a healthy Russia have already merged and already operate in concert."[57]

Shalamov approached these two women in a similarly idealized, yet more complex, way. "The Gold Medal" is the longest short story in the fifth cycle of *The Revival of the Larch* and one of the longest in *Kolyma Stories*. The main part concerns Klimova, but the ending belongs to Stoliarova. I will limit my discussion to Shalamov's depiction of Stoliarova here; the short story deserves a separate analysis.[58] "The Gold Medal" begins with Klimova being rewarded with a medal for excellent behavior in school, and ends with her daughter selling that same medal to aid her material survival after leaving the camp. Stoliarova was Shalamov's intended first reader and they corresponded while he was writing the short story. After reading an early draft, she provided a list of seven points for his consideration. In the first point she grants him the freedom to write as he sees fit ("1. I think you're absolutely free to write how and what you think right, and it is not for me to indicate, I can only thank you. If, however, I do indicate, it is because you have pressured me to do so."[59]). However, in the seventh and final point Stoliarova protests at his including her in the ending, which she sees as akin to defamation: "In general, from the short story it appears that I went to beg for help from a stranger. Would you have been capable of that?"[60] In his reply, Shalamov seems delighted by the

56 Ibid., 500.

57 "Все силы здоровой России вот уже соединились, вот уже действуют заодно." Ibid., 507.

58 See Sergei Solov'ev, "'Povest' nashikh otsov'—ob odnom zamysle Varlama Shalamova," [The story of our fathers—about one intention of Varlam Shalamov], in *Varlam Shalamov v kontekste mirovoi literatury i sovetskoi istorii*, 189–202. My discussion here builds upon my chapter "Telling Her Story" about "The Gold Medal" in my dissertation *Writer or Witness: Problems of Varlam Shalamov's Late Prose and Dramaturgy* (University of California, Berkeley: 2017).

59 "1. Думаю, что Вы абсолютно вольны писать, как и что Вам кажется правильным, не мне Вам указывать, я могу только благодарить Вас. Если все же указываю, то под Вашим давлением." Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 6, 389.

60 "По рассказу вообще получается, что я пришла клянчить помощь у незнакомого человека. А Вы были на это способны?" Ibid., 390.

objection he provoked in her: "Finally the sound of a real human voice."[61] Yet he retained the original ending, although he altered the scene significantly.[62] Still, the new draft failed to impress her: "I'm not very happy that you put me in your short story, I've got decisively nothing to do with it, and if you hadn't named my mother, then you could've come up with anything."[63] In response, Shalamov omitted Stoliarova's name. He did not change the eventual fate of the gold medal, which symbolizes the link he attempted to establish with twentieth-century Russian history. With the fate of Stoliarova—the daughter of a Socialist Revolutionary terrorist who ended up in a Soviet camp—as its climax, the short story is about forging a connection as well as forcing a relationship. Being its writer and becoming its witness, the narrator becomes responsible for both acts in the text.

In the part of the short story that belongs to Stoliarova, she possesses all that is left from her mother: "What remains of this passionate life? Only the gold medal from school in the pocket of a padded jacket from the camp that belongs to the oldest daughter of Natal'ia Sergeevna Klimova."[64] However, she is not the only one in possession of Klimova's story, or even of her own story. The narrator follows Stoliarova on her search for traces of her mother: "I do not walk alone on the trail of Klimova. Her eldest daughter is with me … I remain on the street or, entering after her, I hide somewhere along the walls and merge with the window curtain."[65] From his hiding place, he witnesses all of Stoliarova's life: "I saw her as a newborn and I recalled how her mother's powerful, strong hands, which easily carried around heavy dynamite bombs designated for Stolypin's assassination, with greedy tenderness embraced the little body of her first child."[66] He is by Stoliarova's side after her release from the camps, before the selling of the gold medal: "Now it's 1947 and we stand

61 "Наконец зазвучал настоящий человеческий голос." Ibid., 391.

62 Solov'ev cites the earlier version of the ending in full: Solov'ev, "'Povest' nashikh otsov,'" 216–217.

63 "Мне не очень приятно, что Вы меня припутали в свой рассказ, решительно я в нем ни при чем, и если бы Вы не назвали мать, то и могли бы придумывать все что угодно." Shalamov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 6, 391.

64 "Что же осталось от этой страстной жизни? Только школьная золотая медаль в кармане лагерной телогрейки старшей дочери Натальи Сергеевны Климовой." Ibid., vol. 2, 225.

65 "Я хожу не один по следу Климовой. Со мной ее старшая дочь, и когда мы находим дом, который ищем, женщина входит внутрь, в квартиру, а я остаюсь на улице или, войдя следом за ней, прячусь где-нибудь у стены, сливаюсь с оконной шторой." Ibid.

66 "Я видел ее новорожденной, вспоминал, как сильные, крепкие руки матери, легко таскавшие пудовые динамитные бомбы, назначенные для убийства Столыпина, с жадной нежностью обнимали тельце своего первого ребенка." Ibid., 225.

again together on Sivtsev Vrazhek Lane."[67] The narrator refuses to leave the final scene and hides behind a curtain:

> I stood there merging with the window curtain, with a heavy dusty curtain. I who have known the past and seen the future. I've already been in a concentration camp; I've been a wolf and could appreciate a wolf-like grip. I've understood a few things about the habits of wolves. In my heart, I felt anxiety—not fear, but anxiety—I saw the next day of this short fair-haired woman, the daughter of Natasha Klimova. I saw her the next day and my heart ached.
>
> Я стоял, сливаясь с оконной занавеской, с тяжелой запыленной шторой. Я, знавший прошлое и видевший будущее. Я уже побывал в концлагере, я сам был волком и мог оценить волчиную хватку. Я кое-что в повадках волков понимал. В сердце мое вошла тревога – не страх, а тревога – я увидел завтрашний день этой невысокой русоволосой женщины, дочери Наташи Климовой. Я увидел ее завтрашний день, и сердце мое заныло.[68]

The brief depiction of Stoliarova's physical appearance, one of few, underscores that the narrator is yet again watching her. The dialogue that he observes and which makes him anxious is strange, for several reasons. The woman willing to buy Klimova's gold medal is familiar with her story, yet makes one poignant mistake: "Yes, I heard about this escape. It was a romantic time. And I've read 'The Letter After the Execution.'"[69] She misremembers the title of Klimova's famous letter—not "The Letter Before the Execution" but as "The Letter After the Execution." Such a letter could not exist, yet neither she nor Stoliarova notice this oxymoron. This mistake, which may be missed on first reading "The Gold Medal," anticipates the narrator's reaction to the selling of Klimova's gold medal. The final exchange is not between the unnamed woman and Stoliarova, but between him and Stoliarova: "'You have to leave,' I whispered. 'I have to live,' said the daughter of Natasha Klimova firmly."[70] And she hands over the gold medal.

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67 "Сейчас сорок седьмой год, и мы снова стоим вместе на Сивцевом Бражке." Ibid., 226.

68 Ibid.

69 "Да, я слышала об этом побеге. Романтическое время. И 'Письмо после казни' читала." Ibid., 229.

70 "Вам надо уходить, – прошептал я. – Мне надо жить,– твердо сказала дочь Наташи Климовой. – Вот, – И из кармана лагерной телогрейки она достала тряпичный сверточек." Ibid., 230.

The omnipotent presence of the narrator complicates the narrative of "The Gold Medal," but Shalamov complicates it further as the author behind the text. He was not present at this event in 1947; he never held Klimova's gold medal in his hands,as he did her letters which Stoliarova lent him while he wrote this short story. The selling of the gold medal is a symbol that fulfills its promise as an object that speaks in the place of a short story, even if it speaks also against the same short story and compromises the connection Shalamov forges in Russian twentieth-century history. The relationships between the male narrator and both Klimova and Stoliarova appear unequal: instead of allowing these women to claim a place in Russian history, as "The Gold Medal" explicitly sets out to do, Shalamov the author uses their stories to implicitly claim a place for himself in Russian literature. He conflates the concepts of narrator and author when he maps the spaces of Klimova and becomes a witness to the life of Stoliarova, making himself an integral part of their stories.

However, the presence of both narrator and author constitutes an interference rather than a mediation. Perhaps this was what Stoliarova recognized in it: this text is less about remembering her mother and more about understanding Shalamov, who retrieved and preserved her story. It seems that in "The Gold Medal" he as an author oversteps a boundary, similar to how he seized the stories of the accounts of female others in "Woman of the Thieves' World": this boundary may be inconsequential in fiction, but the nonfictional inspiration behind the short story makes this overstepping momentous. The humanness of Stoliarova as a historical individual seems overwritten by the character of Stoliarova. Shalamov fits her life into his short story; moreover, he inserts himself into her life and leaves the ending haunted by a question: *Whose story is this anyway?*

5 Concluding Remarks

This same question seems to hover over both Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn's chapters concerning women in the Gulag. The simple answer is this: these stories are neither Shalamov's nor Solzhenitsyn's. A more thorough answer must traverse a problematic tension between the personal experience of the writers and the presence of the stories and bodies of others. This tension is not unique to Shalamov or Solzhenitsyn: it can be seen as an integral part of literary testimony that seeks to speak both to the personal experience of the survivor turned author, as well as in the place of the others that inevitably populate such texts. By using their representation of women as a litmus test, the differences between Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn become overshadowed

by one similarity: they both attempted to endow members of this group of "others" with humanness.

However, exactly what they are trying to remember or understand about female prisoners in their texts remains uncertain. The stories of these women are rarely more than the stories of their bodies, which suggests that the humanness conferred upon to the female experience in the Gulag is gendered as well as limited. That, in turn, lays bare the problems and the limits of testimony: how much can be known and how much can be represented? With their chapters on women, both Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn undoubtedly push these limits—but the female experience is a post along this path, not the outermost edge. There are additional others whose stories and bodies require further attention—individuals of different national origin, social class, sexual identity—in *The Gulag Archipelago* and in *Kolyma Stories*. The question of *who* is represented is as important for future scholarship on Gulag narratives as the question *why* these texts were written.

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CHAPTER 11

The Issue of "Softening" and the Problem of Addressivity in Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov

Leona Toker

"I want to have a guarantee *for whom* I am writing," said Varlam Shalamov to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn when the latter proposed that they should write *The Gulag Archipelago* together.[1] Solzhenitsyn understood this as a question about possible publication, or about publication abroad, or about writing into the desk drawer, and he must have been right: "If I were published constantly, I would write day and night," notes Shalamov in his 1965 notebook.[2]

In a broader context, however, Shalamov's statement about a guarantee for whom he writes has other implications, especially on the difference between the addressivity of the two writers: Solzhenitsyn's main target audience was the reader who had not been in the camps, whereas Shalamov seems to have kept in mind fellow-veterans among the readers. For Shalamov, those who had been spared the experience of the camps would be not so much the target audience, that is, the immediate internalized addressee,[3] but what I would

1 "Я хочу иметь гарантию, *для кого* пишу." Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "S Varlamom Shalamovym" [With Varlam Shalamov], *Novyi Mir* 4 (1999), 166. See the discussion in Luba Jurgenson, "Pourquoi Soljenitsyne et Chalamov n'ont-ils pas écrit *L'Archipel du Goulag* ensemble," *Mémoires en jeu* / *Memories at Stake* 1 (2016), 86–92.

2 "Если бы я печатался постоянно, я бы писал день и ночь." Varlam Shalamov, "Zapisnye knizhki 1954–1979 gg." [Notebooks for 1954–1979], *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh* [Collected Works in Six Volumes], vol. 5 (Moscow: 2004–2005), 289. Unless otherwise indicated (as in the cases when John Glad's translations of the stories from *Kolyma Tales* are referred to), the quotations from Shalamov's texts come from this edition, and the translations are my own.

3 See Leona Toker, "Target Audience, Hurdle Audience, and the General Reader: Varlam Shalamov's Art of Testimony," *Poetics Today* 26, no. 2 (2005), 281–303. I wish to complicate the distinctions made in that article by taking into account the stance of the "training audience" and Shalamov's response to its quest for understanding. My interpretation of Shalamov's addressivity thus differs from Elena Mikhailik's emphasis on Shalamov's mercilessness to a culturally incompetent resistant readership (see Mikhailik, *Nezakonnaia kometa. Varlam Shalamov: Opyt medlennogo chteniia* [Forbidden Comet: Varlam Shalamov, an Exercise in Close Reading] [Moscow: 2018], 241, 247) and from Svetlana Boym's representation of Shalamov's reader as "put in the position of a fellow convict, a newcomer but not

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call "the training audience"—readers removed from the author in time, space, culture, or experience but seeking to understand the codes that the author shared with his target audience. The notion of the "training audience" is close to that of "the model reader" imagined by Umberto Eco: readers who bring a certain model of competence to the reading of a text but also allow the text to "build up" or enhance this competence, or rather cooperate with the text in augmenting and refining it. Implicitly or explicitly addressing "training readers" is a particularly important aspect of factographic literature: they turn to memoirs, autobiographies, as well as to fictionalized testimony "for the sake of the facts," but without depending solely on such materials for their "training." Training audiences combine learning from the attesting narratives with learning from other sources, in order to fall back on knowledge culled elsewhere for a better understanding of the literary works, especially when it comes to appreciating their artistic merit. This improved understanding, in turn, tests and modifies the mental patterns that the training audience brings along to the reading.

Solzhenitsyn likewise addresses a "training audience," especially in "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich," but the primary target audience of *The Gulag Archipelago* seems to be readers whose mind-set is largely a product of Soviet education—they have to be shown what that education distorted or elided, and are likely to resist many of the author's attitudes.[4] However, the very fact that such audiences read *The Gulag Archipelago* would indicate their readiness to re-learn and re-train. It seems that the target audience of Solzhenitsyn is resistant but on the move to the position of the "training reader," whereas Shalamov's postulated audience consists of the like-minded, the veterans, and those "in training," in quest of understanding.

The self-reflective sketch "Through the Snow" (Po snegu) that opens *Kolyma Stories* points to the distinction between Shalamov's target audience and the training reader. The snow through which the prisoners must clear the road, working in teams of five, is like the white sheet of paper, literature's *terra incognita* of the Gulag subject:

> The first man has the hardest task, and when he is exhausted, another man from the group of five takes his place. Each of them—even the smal-

entirely an outsider" ("'Banality of Evil,' Mimicry, and the Soviet Subject: Varlam Shalamov and Hannah Arendt," *Slavic Review* 67, no. 2 [2008], 348).

4 One example is Solzhenitsyn's sympathetic account of the predicament of the Vlasovites—former Soviet soldiers, mainly POWs, who had enlisted to fight on the German side under the command of General Vlasov and whom Soviet citizens generally regarded as traitors.

> lest and the weakest—must beat down a section of virgin snow, and not simply follow in another's footsteps.[5]
>
> Первому тяжелее всех, и когда он выбивается из сил, вперед выходит другой из той же головной пятерки. Их идущих по следу каждый, даже самый маленький, самый слабый, должен ступить на кусочек снежной целины, а не в чужой след.[6]

When the team has trampled down the snow with their own bodies, the road has been cleared for horses and tractors. The latter, says the story's astounding punch line, are driven by the readers rather than by the writers. This is both a hint at the great numbers of artists and intellectuals who perished in the camps and a meta-literary point: when even the best-intentioned training audience follows the trajectory of a Gulag writer, its experience will be like that of driving a car through a half-ready road—much easier than laying this road with one's own feet, with one's body. Shalamov does not wish his training readers to enact such an experience. His primary target audience, those who have been there, will understand him and will know, for instance, that prisoners whose hands had been amputated were often used for that snow-path laying job; but other readers are expected to be aware of the limits of their imaginative self-projection into camp realities. As to what kind of prisoners were often used for trampling down the path through the snow, the training audience may one day come to learn that too and use that knowledge for

5 Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales*, trans. John Glad (Harmondsworth: 1994), 3–4. As Yasha Klots has revealed, Glad's translation was made from the texts that were available to him—those serialized in the New York Russian émigré periodical *Novyi Zhurnal*, where they had undergone some editing by Roman Gul'. See Klots, "Varlam Shalamov between Tamizdat and the Soviet Writers' Union (1966–1978)," *Russian Literature* 96–98 (2018), 137–166. Shalamov's recognition in the English-speaking world was slow: John Glad waged a brave and hard battle to get his translations published. A new translation, with *all* the stories of *Kolymskie rasskazy*, has recently been issued: Varlam Shalamov, *Kolyma Stories*, trans. Donald Rayfield (New York: 2018).

6 Shalamov, "Po snegu" [Through the Snow], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, 47. The metaphor of a trodden path is used also in Shalamov's remark on innovativeness in literature, in his 1961 notebook: "A writer, a poet, does not open any paths. The road that he has travelled cannot be travelled any longer." ["Писатель, поэт не открывает никаких путей. По тем дорогам, по которым он прошел, уже нельзя ходить."] *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, 267. A similar point is made symbolically in the short story "Tropa" [The Path]: the speaker would compose poetry while pacing on a footpath near his cabin in the taiga, but after he notices another man's footprints there, the path becomes unsuitable for poetry (see *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, 105–106). The story is placed at the head of the cycle "The Revival of the Larch" (Voskreshenie listvennitsy): the opening texts in Shalamov's story-cycles are often meta-literary.

a better understanding of "Through the Snow" with its paradox of handless writers.[7]

The episodic character of Shalamov's tales, in which certain scenes are blown up while their background remains obscure, is associated with this type of addressivity: Shalamov is speaking, first of all, to the veterans. In the story "Noch'iu" (In the Night), for instance, two prisoners, Glebov and Bagretsov, are shown finishing their evening meal, involuntarily watching each other while doing so; they then sally forth on some secret expedition, which turns out to be a Gulag version of a grave robbery: they seek out a corpse and remove its clothing, which they can later trade for food and tobacco. We do not know who the dead man is—but he was not "one of us," since he was not buried naked in a common grave, with a plywood tag attached to his foot.[8] We do not know how he died, or was killed, who buried him, or how the two men know where he was buried. We do not know why the two are not afraid of being caught harboring his possessions. An experienced reader of Gulag literature might perhaps think that this was a case of the post-war wave of the killing of informers and collaborators that spread through the camps. However, former camp inmates—Shalamov's primary target audience—could easily supply a whole range of scenarios that could contextualize the situation. It is their click of recognition that Shalamov seeks. That is not to say, however, that he does not also turn to the training audience and help them—us—to decipher camp codes. Mentioning how Glebov finishes his meal, he notes that, in the case of camp bread, taste is irrelevant; as to Bagretsov's compulsive watching of Glebov, he comments that no one "had enough will power to take his eyes from food disappearing in another's mouth."[9] These remarks are made for the sake of the training audience.

In the famous story "On Tick" (Na predstavku) the help offered the training audience is more extensive. The description of the card game in the horse-drivers' barracks is in fact an explanation of the camp codes for the sake of the uninitiated. But if the *cognitive* experience of the authorial audience is thus

7 Sarah Young notes that, on first opening *Kolyma Stories*, the reader may even fail to understand that the people (referred to as "the men") who are trampling down the road through the snow are convicts; see "Mapping Spaces as Factography: Human Traces and Negated Genres in Varlam Shalamov's *Kolymskie rasskazy*," *Slavonica* 19, no. 1 (2013), 1. However, few readers would not know in advance that the book deals with Gulag experience.

8 Georgii Demidov's story "Bez birki" [Without a Tag] in *Chudnaia planeta* [The Wonder Planet] (Moscow: 2008), 115–176, is devoted to a prisoner's search for the kind of death that would save him from the typical Kolyma burial with a plywood tag attached to the corpse's foot.

9 Shalamov, *Kolyma Stories*, 11.

facilitated, Shalamov does not soften the impact on their emotions. The humdrum card game, of a kind clearly all too familiar to the inmates, leads to the total loss of the property of one of the players. A gambler's catastrophe is a familiar literary topos: indeed, the first sentence of the story contains an obvious allusion to Pushkin's "The Queen of Spades." This topos usually involves the death, suicide, or some disaster for the loser. What is harrowing at the end of "On Tick" is that the object of the not unexpected violence is not the insolvent loser of the game but a bystander, the political prisoner who has been cutting firewood for the criminals' barracks in exchange for the liquid remains of their soup: he is killed because he does not want to part from his sweater which the game's loser wants to use to pay his card debt. Even less expected is the story's final line: instead of expressing outrage, or vowing to avoid the criminals' barracks in the future, the first-person narrator sums up his loss: "Now I had to find a new partner to cut wood with."[10]

Camp veterans would probably recognize the truth of this ending. For the training audience it comes as a shock, clearly showing that no matter how much they learn about the codes of the camps, no matter how good their cognitive progress, it will be hard to imagine what personality changes a fellow intellectual would have had to undergo in order to respond like the first-person narrator of the story. Unlike Solzhenitsyn, Shalamov does not spare the training audience: on the contrary, he sharpens the blow by making it thwart conventional expectations.

Another effect of several of Shalamov's stories—and, by extension, of the whole collection—is the difference between the first and the second readings. Revisiting "On Tick," the reader knows the ending in advance (it is not likely to be forgotten), and, in the light of this "advance retrospection,"[11] the whole experience of taking in the preceding details becomes qualitatively different. The same is also true of the story "In the Night," in which the reader is given inside views of the characters, especially Glebov, but is not informed about their intentions, the purpose of their nocturnal expedition—until they complete their mission of appropriating the dead man's clothes for the next day's trade.[12] Only on a repeated reading does it become clear how the story

10 Shalamov, *Kolyma Stories*, 10. "Теперь надо было искать другого партнера для пилки дров." *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, 53. For an excellent recent discussion of the cultural contexts and intertexts of "On Tick," see Mikhailik, *Nezakonnaia kometa*, 57–76.

11 Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: 1974), 282.

12 The technique is here similar to what Gérard Genette calls "paralipsis"—suppressing information that is available to the focal character; see Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay on Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: 1980), 195.

reverses the "grave-robbery" topos: we sympathize with the robbers and learn to read their exploit (which would have been disgusting under other circumstances) as a symptom of the state to which they have been reduced, and also as an account of their actually heroic struggle for survival, although it breaks a taboo. The representation of the dead man as, apparently, one of the camp "prominents" or else one of the professional thieves helps to maintain our sympathy for the robbers: it is not a fellow sufferer but a traitor whose final resting place is desecrated.

Reversals of the audience's expectations and value judgments in Shalamov's stories are among the techniques that constitute built-in demands for a repeated reading. Surprise endings are another such technique: they enhance the reader's sense of unfinished business and promise that a repeated reading will be a qualitatively different experience. The reader may wish, for instance, to construct the chronology of the authorial persona's camp experience, which is possible only by means of repeated readings.[13] As Young notes, the readers' compulsion to revisit Shalamov's texts parallels an aspect of the Gulag inmate's experience—"not only the monotony and endlessness of camp life for the convict but also the permanence of its effects on survivors."[14] This compulsion is also an integral part of the audience's "training" process.

By contrast, in Solzhenitsyn's "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich" the reader is usually informed about what the protagonist is up to: his intentions are known; it is the success or the failure of his intentions that keeps us in suspense on the first reading.

Shalamov's expectations of his target audience are associated with his perception of his own position as the author of what he called "new prose"—a counterweight to the *nouveau roman*. In the 1965 essay "On Prose," he disapproves of Hemingway's remaining a "tourist" in Spain, no matter how long he had been fighting in Madrid:

> New prose denies this principle of tourism. The writer is not an observer, not a spectator, but a participant in the drama of life, a participant not in the guise of a writer, not in the role of a writer.
>
> Pluto risen from Hades, not Orpheus who descended there.

13 See Luba Jurgenson, *L'expérience concentrationnaire est-elle indicible?* (Paris: 2003), 263.

14 Sarah J. Young, "Recalling the Dead: Repetition, Identity, and the Witness in Varlam Shalamov's *Kolymskie rasskazy*," *Slavic Review* 70, no. 2 (2011), 372.

> Новая проза отрицает этот принцип туризма. Писатель – не наблюдатель, не зритель, а участник драмы жизни, участник не в писательском обличье, не в писательской роли.
>
> Плутон, поднявшийся из ада, а не Орфей, спускавшийся в ад.[15]

The focalizer of Shalamov's stories is an involved participant of the events described: a "flesh witness"[16] rather than a tour guide or a guest for the night.

It may be regarded as a case of Shalamov's well-known self-contradictions that this criticism of the "tourist principle" in narratives of testimony clashes with his own remarks, especially in his notebooks, to the effect that it is harmful for a writer to be *too* familiar with his material—the writer should approach his subject from the position of an outsider, a position he would share with the reader:

> The poet must be a little deaf, so that sound repetition should be captured better, so that it should be easier to shift words. A little blind, for "one's own vision," one's own poetic eye—is actually a kind of color-blindness, an ophthalmic disease.
>
> And he should by all means be a foreigner in his material, a little alien to that which he is writing about.

> Поэт должен быть немножко глухим, чтобы лучше ловились звуковые повторы, легче сдвигались слова. Немножко слепым, ибо «собственное зрение», свой поэтический глаз – это уже вид дальтонизма, это глазное заболевание.
>
> И обязательно – иностранец в материале, немножко чуждым тому, о чем он пишет.[17]

However, these remarks (which seem to be of dubious sincerity) pertain to the writing of poetry, not prose. On his ideal of "new prose," Shalamov writes in a 1961 notebook:

> On the prose of the future. Like that of Saint-Exupéry. The prose of authenticity, which sounds like a document, a vouching for knowledge,

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15 Shalamov, "O proze" [On Prose], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, 151. Svetlana Boym explains: "The narrator speaks as Pluto, the permanent resident of the underworld, not as Orpheus, an overly excited one-time visitor." "'Banality of Evil,'" 348.

16 On "flesh-witnessing" see Yuval Noah Harari, "Scholars, Eyewitnesses, and Flesh-Witnesses of War: A Tense Relationship," *Partial Answers* 7, no. 2 (2009), 213–228.

17 Shalamov, "Zapisnye knizhki" [Notebooks], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, 264.

> full knowledge, authorial vouching. In contrast to the prose of the past and the present, where for the sake of success the writer should not know too well and too much about his material.
>
> О прозе будущего. Вроде Сент-Экзюпери. Проза достоверности, звучащая, как документ, ручательство знания, авторское ручательство. В отличие от прозы прошлого и настоящего, где писатель для успеха не должен знать слишком много, слишком хорошо свой материал.[18]

Solzhenitsyn believes that Shalamov's remarks about the value of the writer's not knowing his material reflect his bitterness on having been neglected by the literary establishment.[19] Indeed, I find these remarks to be sarcastic.

The "principle of tourism" is Shalamov's criticism not so much of Viktor Shklovsky's concept of defamiliarization as of the length to which this concept may be taken. The point about literary art as casting a veil of unfamiliarity over the familiar goes back at least to Romantic manifestos such as Wordsworth's "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" and Shelley's "A Defense of Poetry." In his 1917 essay "Iskusstvo kak priem" (Art as Technique), Shklovsky explains that literary texts de-automatize the reader's experience by making the familiar strange; he does so in the framework of polemics with the followers of Herbert Spencer and Aleksandr Potebnia, who attributed merit to the kind of style that economized (but did not eliminate) the reader's mental effort. For Shklovsky, art aims, on the contrary, "to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged."[20] Shalamov's attitude to the issue of defamiliarization was ambivalent: on the one hand, his primary target audience, the veterans, must have expected a faithful mirror held up to their experience; on the other hand, for his training audience the very content of his texts was strange and arresting.[21]

According to his remarks in the 1960 story "Galstuk" (The Necktie), an "estranged" treatment of his materials would actually constitute a kind of "softening," making things emotionally or intellectually easier for the reader:

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18 Ibid., 273.

19 Solzhenitsyn, "S Varlamov Shalamovym," 165.

20 Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. L. Lemon and M. Reis (Lincoln: 1969), 12.

21 As it is suggested by the opening of "On Tick" with its clear allusion to Pushkin's tale, what is defamiliarized in this and other stories is the canonical tradition of the humanistic Russian fiction.

> It has so far been a requirement of success that the writer should be somewhat of a foreigner in the land about which he writes. That he should write from the point of view of the people, with their interests and horizons, among whom he has been brought up and acquired habits, tastes, views. The writer uses the language of those, whose spokesman he is, and no more. If the writer knows his material too well, those for whom he writes will not understand him. He has reneged, gone over to his material.
>
> One should not know one's material too well. This is true for all the writers of the past and of the present, but the prose of the future demands otherwise. It is not writers who will speak, but professionals who possess a gift for writing. And they will tell only what they know and have seen. Accuracy—that is the force of the literature of the future.

> В прошлом и настоящем для успеха необходимо, чтобы писатель был кем-то вроде иностранца в той стране, о которой он пишет. Чтобы он писал с точки зрения людей, – их интересов, кругозора, – среди которых он вырос и приобрел привычки, вкусы, взгляды. Писатель пишет на языке тех, от имени которых он говорит. И не больше. Если же писатель знает материал слишком хорошо, те, для кого он пишет, не поймут писателя. Писатель изменил, перешел на сторону своего материала.
>
> Не надо знать материал слишком. Таковы все писатели прошлого и настоящего, но проза будущего требует другого. Заговорят не писатели, а люди профессии, обладающие писательским даром. И они расскажут только о том, что знают, видели. Достоверность – вот сила литературы будущего.[22]

The "professionals" in question are not the professional writers to be contrasted to "the smallest and the weakest" of the five who trample down the snow: no, they are people of other than literary professions and with "flesh-witness" experience, who also "possess the gift for writing" and are experts in their work and their souls. Faced with the unusual things that they must relate, such writers have to tread a fine line between the Charybdis of total strangeness and the Scylla of normalizing what should not be deemed normal.

Unlike Shalamov, Solzhenitsyn addresses a target audience that does not know the camps at first hand and, like training audience, needs a tour of the

22 Shalamov, "Galstuk" [The Necktie], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, 137.

institution. Solzhenitsyn tells us that in "Ivan Denisovich" he "softened" (or, as the English version has it, "lightened") the material,[23] to help it past the various rungs of censorship (the hurdle audience), but the success of the story with its target audience was likewise enhanced by that softening.[24] Not only did he choose the time and place in which the worst atrocities of camp experience could be avoided, he also opted for lucky outcomes to each situation, with the unlucky outcomes suggested as what Gerald Prince calls "the disnarrated":[25] the reader is informed about the possibility of harsh developments and also spared the need to visualize them in following the protagonist's day—as if in accordance with the pedagogical principle of one difficulty at a time.[26] This narrative technique contrasts sharply with that found in Shalamov's "On Tick," or in his "Yagody" (Berries) or "Odinochnyi zamer" (The Individual Assignment), even when the lethal outcome is displaced from the focal character

23 "I simply took Shch-854 and copied it out in a 'lightened' version, leaving out the roughest episodes and expressions of opinion" (Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Oak and the Calf: Sketches of the Literary Life in the Soviet Union*, trans. Harry Willetts [London: 1980], 13). In the original, Solzhenitsyn calls this "perepechatal *oblegchenno*," yet in another place he uses the expression "smiagcheni[e] rezkostei" (*Bodalsia telenok s dubom: Ocherki literaturnoi zhizni* [Paris: 1975], 19, 17). On the place of "Ivan Denisovich" in Solzhenitsyn's thought and writing (it was his first work to be published but not at all the first to be written), see Michael A. Nicholson, "Ivan Denisovich: Mify proiskhozhdeniia" [Ivan Denisovich: The Myths of Origin], in *Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha A. I. Solzhenitsyna: Khudozhestvennyi mir, poetika, kul'turnyi kontekst* [One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich: Storyworld, Poetics, Cultural Context], ed. A. V. Urmanov (Blagoveshchensk: 2003), 3–36. For a recent analysis of the novella in terms of the structure of Solzhenitsyn's imagination and its historical contexts, see Richard Tempest, *Overwriting Chaos: Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's Fictive Works* (Boston: 2019), 69–105.

24 Testimony to this effect can be found in the somewhat apologetic comments of Nadezhda Mandelstam in the chapter "The Years of Silence" in her *Hope Abandoned*, trans. Max Hayward (Harmondsworth: 1976), 684. Later, and with more confidence, it is reconfirmed in the memoirs of Lilianna Lungina; see Section 51 of her *Podstrochnik* [The Gloss] (Moscow: 2009), 270–271. I have heard numerous ordinary readers likewise state that it was Solzhenitsyn's novella that really gave them a feel of what it was like in the camps; this was my own experience until, on reading Shalamov (and other authors) later in life, I saw that things were actually much worse.

25 See Prince, "The Disnarrated," *Style* 22, no. 1 (1988), 1–8.

26 As Elena Mikhailik notes, every event in "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich" is represented as a set of possible scripts; the better alternatives are allowed to materialize in the story. See Mikhailik, "Kot, begushchii mezhdu Solzhenitsynym i Shalamovym" [The Cat that Runs between Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov], in *Shalamovskii sbornik* 3 [Shalamov Collection 3], ed. V. V. Esipov (Vologda: 2002). On the evocation of the spectrum of possibilities in this novella see also Leona Toker, *Return from the Archipelago: Narratives of Gulag Survivors* (Bloomington: 2000), 192–193.

to the next man, a fellow inmate. Indeed, with the exception of "The Individual Assignment," the life of the protagonist is (temporarily) spared, but the atrocity is not disnarrated—it is a part of the plot, and the way in which it is de-dramatized may be more disconcerting than a tragic or pathetic heightening.

That is not to say that Shalamov did not, to some extent, "soften" his material for the sake of the training audience. His way of doing so is, however, less a matter of distributing the atrocities between the narrated and the disnarrated than that of the sequence of the stories in his collections. This is what I have called "the pulsation principle:"[27]stories that give the readers harsh blows ("On Tick," "The Individual Assignment," or "The Parcel") alternate with the stories devoted to feats of individual adaptation or information that is absorbed cognitively rather than emotionally. This is a two-edged method: on the one hand, it tends to give the readers' emotions a rest; on the other hand, through contrast, it sharpens the ensuing blows. The blows are intended to hurt; and had the stories been arranged as an uninterrupted sequence of blows, this would have led to a certain blunting of the reader's sensitivity to them. To some extent, the reader would then re-enact, in a model form, the well-known issue of the witness or perpetrator becoming inured to human suffering, an effect exploited in such novels as Kosiński's *The Painted Bird* and Littell's *The Kindly Ones* and partly justifying the would-be pornographic escalation effected in those novels: the reader, inured to atrocities, needs, as it were, intensifying stimuli. Solzhenitsyn is almost forced to create this effect in some chapters of *The Gulag Archipelago*, especially in the hearsay chapters where he arranges reported incidents in the order of the intensity of the evil or suffering—this is particularly evident in the chapter on torture during the interrogations, where narrative structure partly reproduces the escalation of torture that would take place in the case of the resistant prisoners whom, for one or another reason, the interrogators were determined to break. In *The Gulag Archipelago* the negative effects of escalation are partly defused by the unending variations in style and idiom with which Solzhenitsyn refers to specific cases.

The meaning of Shalamov's pulsation method is also associated with the issue of the credibility of survivor testimonies to atrocities. Credibility is usually reduced if the reader is offered a Grand-Guignol uninterrupted listing of acts of cruelty. Conversely, credibility is enhanced if such a sequence is punctuated by accounts of adaptation which helped the prisoners to survive. Unlike Vladimir Petrov in the 1951 *It Happens in Russia*, or, mutatis

27 See Toker, *Return from the Archipelago*, 161–162.

mutandis, Alexander Dolgun in *Alexander Dolgun's Story: An American in the Gulag* (1976), Shalamov is not proud of his own or his protagonists' feats of primary or secondary adjustment; he would have been prouder of more heroic kinds of resistance. In "Pervyi zub" (The First Tooth) or "Poslednii boi maiora Pugacheva" (The Last Battle of Major Pugachev) Shalamov demonstrates the futility of such resistance, yet the sense of a hankering after traditional heroism lingers over these narratives as well. Shalamov may here be following Tolstoy's suggestion that the truth of narrative is bound up with the account of things that the author would have reasons to be ashamed of or to regret.[28] What makes his testimony so effective is not only the account of survival loopholes in the deadly Kolyma mines but also, and perhaps mainly, the constant if underplayed sense of self-deprecation in the stories of how the focal characters' put those loopholes to good use.

The pattern of pulsation is not, however, the only principle that can be inferred from the sequence of Shalamov's stories. Another principle is that of alternation of stories that have no clear "signposts of fictionalization"[29] (such as, for instance, "In the Snow," "On Tick," and "Berries," told by an anonymous narrator who can well be taken for an authorial persona) with stories that display prominently fictional traits (e.g. "In the Night" or "The Individual Assignment," told in the third person but offering inside views of focal characters who are not identified with the authorial persona). These juxtapositions

28 In chapter 19 of "Otrochestvo" [Boyhood] in his *Childhood, Boyhood, Youth*, Tolstoy writes that "incongruity between a person's position and his moral activity is the most reliable sign of the truth" ("несообразность между положением человека и его моральной деятельностью есть вернейший признак истины"), Lev Tolstoy, *Destvo, Otrochestvo, Yunost'* (Moscow: 1966), 157. By "moral activity" Tolstoy means mainly the life of emotion, the ethics of feeling. In chapter 23 he reinforces the point: "I repeat, lack of verisimilitude in the matter of feeling is the surest sign of the truth" ("Опять повторяю, что неправдоподобность в деле чувства есть вернейший признак истины," ibid., 170). These remarks can be exemplified by the account of Irteniev's mixed emotional response to his mother's death, with pure grief, exhibited by some of the others, seeming to occupy the smallest psychic space among shifting thoughts and affects, which may, of course, be a matter of emotional self-defense. The narrator of J. D. Salinger's "Seymour: An Introduction" doubts the sincerity of even this claim to the truth: "a confessional passage has probably never been written that didn't stink a little bit of the writer's pride in having given up his pride" (*Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction* [New York: 1963], 167).

29 Whereas every feature of the *factographic* status of narratives can be faked, the *fictional* status of narratives usually emerges with sufficient clarity from features such as shifting focalization or inside views of the characters who are supposed to die at the end of the story. For a discussion of a variety of "signposts of fictionalization" see Dorrit Cohn, *The Distinction of Fiction* (Baltimore: 1999), 109–132.

of seemingly factographic and fictional modes suggest that we should read *all* the texts in the collection as testimony but ask of them questions that are usually reserved for fiction, e.g. questions about the meaning of the collocations of events or about symbolism. What, for instance, is the meaning of placing the episode of the criminals cooking and eating a dog in the same short story that represents the authorial persona's conversation with a priest who is praying in the forest in "Vykhodnoi den'" (A Day Off)? In a purely documentary mode, such questions would be irrelevant: the collocation would be read as reflecting the actual sequence of the events in the author's experience rather than an approach to the problem of what sustains a suffering human being. And what is the symbolic meaning of the tufts of grass that an armed guard places to mark the forbidden zone in "Berries"? A purely factographic mode would require this detail to be read as a sign rather than a symbol—a symbol of, say, the guard's residual moral barrier against killing a prisoner first and stage-managing an escape attempt afterwards. The deployment of the texts in Shalamov's collections calls for a semiotic and a figurative reading at the same time.

However, the lesson of Solzhenitsyn's "softening" seems to have been partly adopted in Shalamov's later work, in particular in the two "Wheelbarrow" stories ("Tachka I" and "Tachka II") in the collection *Perchatka, ili KR-2* (The Glove, or KT-2). Though these stories, or rather sketches, explain to the reader, in a somewhat tortuous and suspense-creating way, what a wheelbarrow-pusher's day used to be like and why the wheelbarrow is an apt symbol of forced labor as practiced specifically in Kolyma, at one point the narrative moves from the usual state of affairs to an account of a singular occasion: "I have a vivid memory of the summer night when I rolled a big wheelbarrow loaded by my comrades to the gangway."[30]

The authorial persona must roll the wheelbarrow from the planks of the trench where his cell is working to the central gangway that leads to the trestle (*estakada*); then push it up the trestle and return for a new load. At the juncture with the central gangway, he is knocked off by "comrades" from other cells but manages to keep the wheelbarrow on the planks. Now he has to negotiate the ascent to the trestle:

30 "Я хорошо помню летнюю ночь, когда выкатил груженную моими товарищами большую тачку на трап." Shalamov, "Tachka II" [Wheelbarrow II], *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, 351. I discuss these two texts in detail in "Representation of Forced Labor in Shalamov's 'Wheelbarrow I' and 'Wheelbarrow II'", *Mémoires en jeu / Memories at Stake* 1 (2016), 77–85, as well as in i *Gulag Literature and the Literature of Nazi Camps: An Intercontextual Reading* (Bloomington: 2019), 105–127.

> I felt that I was late, and exerting all my last strength I pushed the wheelbarrow to the beginning of the ascent. But I had no strength to push that wheelbarrow up, though it was not full. I who had long been walking the lands of the mine shuffling with the soles of my footgear, not lifting the soles off the ground, with no strength to walk otherwise, to raise my feet higher, or faster. This is the way I had been walking in the camp and in the mine for a long time, through pokes and prods of team leaders, guards, headmen, foremen, orderlies, and overseers.
>
> Я чувствовал, что я опаздываю, и напряжением последних сил вытолкнул тачку к началу подъема. Но не было сил толкать эту тачку, неполную тачку, вверх. Я, который давно уже ходил по приисковой земле, шаркая подошвами, передвигая ноги, не отрывая подошв от земли, не имея сил сделать иначе – ни выше поднять ногу, ни быстрее. Я давно уже ходил так по лагерю и по забою – под тычки бригадиров, конвоиров, десятников, прорабов, дневальных и надзирателей.[31]

Re-enacting another aspect of the Sisyphus myth, the protagonist is again knocked off the gangway when he is already quite close to the trestle, this time catastrophically, "along with the wheelbarrow, which I still held by the handle, as if I still had somewhere to go, to drive it, apart from hell."[32] Solzhenitsyn's lesson of the choice of successful outcomes applies to the man's first fall, when the wheelbarrow remained in place, but not to this second one—when the wheelbarrow is knocked off the gangway, he has to muster his remaining strength and reload it:

> And so I started to gather the quicksand with the spade: it is a slippery porridge of stone, similar to quicksilver in weight, and just as elusive, slippery stone-dough. One has to hack it into pieces with the spade, and pick up so as to throw into the wheelbarrow, [and] it was impossible, I had not enough strength, and with my hands I tore off pieces of the quicksand, the heavy, slippery, precious quicksand.
>
> И вот я принялся собирать плывун лопатой – это скользкая каменная каша, по тяжести похожая на ртуть, и такое же неуловимое,

31 Ibid., 352.

32 "вместе с тачкой, которую я еще удерживал за ручку, как будто мне было еще надо куда-то ехать, куда-то править, кроме ада." Ibid.

> скользкое, каменное тесто. Лопатой нужно было разрубить на куски и поддеть для того, чтобы закинуть на тачку, [и] было невозможно, не хватало сил, и я руками отрывал куски от этого плывуна, тяжелого, скользкого, драгоценного плывуна.[33]

The ascent of Shalamov's wheelbarrow pusher to the trestle is then interrupted, in a Sisyphean manner, for the third time:

> Again I placed the wheelbarrow on the gangway and attempted to push it to the trestle.
>
> And again I was knocked off.

> Я снова поставил тачку на трап и пытался вытолкнуть ее на эстакаду.
>
> И снова меня сбили.[34]

This time, however, the principle of softening is resumed: the man is knocked off the gangway, but the loaded wheelbarrow is not. Indeed, had the repeated fall of the wheelbarrow been represented, the self-portrait of the slave laborer might have accrued clownish attributes. These are avoided by his being represented as managing to keep the wheelbarrow from spilling out again. There is also an additional effect, which may actually be the mainly intended one: a special irony in that the fall of the man is preferable to the fall of the wheelbarrow with its inanimate load.[35]

Had Shalamov's stories been formatted as purely memoiristic, this moment of softening would have been seen as accurately representing a specific event, an undated summer night. In the corpus where factography seamlessly combines with fictionalization, however, the motivation for this micro-episode may, by contrast, be sought in its expected effect on the reader—that is, in aesthetic considerations joining the agenda of attestation.

The difference between Shalamov's axiology and that of Solzhenitsyn is thus bound up with the structures of their addressivity. However, the issue of the target audience is primarily associated with the initial impact of their

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33 Ibid., 353.

34 Ibid.

35 A Midrashic tradition associates the fall of the Tower of Babel with a similar indifference to the value of human life: "If a man fell and died, they paid no heed to him, but if a brick fell they sat down and wept, and said: Woe to us! Where will another come in its stead." See Batnadiv Hakarmi, "Hubris, Language, and Oppression: Recreating Babel in Primo Levi's *If This Is a Man* and the Midrash," *Partial Answers* 7, no. 1 (2009), 39.

narratives. On a repeated reading several decades later, when the attesting function of their narratives has become partly redundant, the status of both of these authors shifts from that of canonical Gulag writers to that of, simply, canonical Russian writers. The close-reading methods in the study of Shalamov's narratives accord well with this new status; yet it seems that Solzhenitsyn's Gulag works—in particular (paradoxical as it may sound), the giant text of *The Gulag Archipelago*—might also reward a new surge of attention to their artistic features. The target audiences of Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov no longer exist: they can now be seen mainly as historical constructs that may improve our understanding of the two writers' narrative choices. The training audiences who seek such an understanding, as well as some level of competence about the world of concentration camps, now merge with the general reader.

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Index

A

acheiropoiesis 123–8, 137
Adamova-Sliozberg, Olga 257
addressivity 271–86
Adorno, Theodor W. 45, 64, 122
Agamben, Giorgio 5
Aigi, Gennadi 57
Aikman, David 208
Akhmatova, Anna A. 36, 45, 241
Aldan-Semenov, Andrei 93, 93n48
Aleksandrov, Kirill 81n23
amputation 128–32
Andersen, Hans Christian 59
Annenskii, Innokentii F. 19
archives 17, 30, 33, 129–30, 159–60, 171, 229
  archival depradations 18–19
  archival holdings of Solzhenitsyn (1930s and 1940s), range of genres in 31–2
  of Russian émigré organizations 241
  Russian State Archive of Literature and Art 146n11, 171n65, 173n69
  Solzhenitsyn's archival legacy 43
Arendt, Hannah 45n2
art
  artwork and memory 119–23
  artworks, truth of 196
  poetry, artistic deformation in 184
  Shalamov's perspective on artworks 147–8
  testimony, art and provision of 11
  violence of 185–194
Artaud, Antonin 187, 196
Aseev, Nikolai 18
Assmann, Aleida 10, 122, 130, 144–5, 150–51
audiences 12, 187, 227, 234, 235, 243, 276, 280
  "authorial audience" 11–12, 274–5
  "training audience" 271–2, 273–5, 278, 279–80, 281, 286
Auschwitz 5, 45, 133, 138, 155, 156–7, 252
authenticity 54, 104, 131, 177n1, 277–8
  documentary authenticity 23
  laconism and obsessive search for Shalamov 27–8
autobiographical texts within *Gulag Archipelago* 74
autocritical notes 91
Averintsev, Sergei 1–2

B

Babel, Isaak F. 27, 54–5
Bacon, Francis 178, 187–9, 190, 191
Balzamo, Elena 206–7
Barasch, Moshe 120n4
Barber, Charles 124n17
Beckett, Samuel 66
Belinsky, Vissarion 184
Belyi, Andrei 27, 114–15, 119–20, 126–7, 128, 130, 136n71, 138
Benjamin, Walter 177–8n2
Biblical setting in structure of *Gulag Archipelago* 245
biography of Solzhenitsyn, richness of 30
Blok, Aleksandr 45, 57
body
  bodiless love 262–3
  destruction of human body 142–3
  as medium of memory 151, 153, 155, 158, 160, 170–71
  somatic aspect of writing 167
  specificity and return to physiological formation 138
Boehm, Gottfried 123n15
Borowski, Tadeusz 108–9
Boym, Svetlana 45n2
brain 149–50, 159
Braudel, Fernand 230, 246
Bredekamp, Horst 125
Brik, Osip M. 23–4
Briusov, Valery 42
Brodsky, Joseph 46, 48, 51, 244–5
Bruegel, Pieter the Elder 113
Bulhof, Johannes 210
Bullock, Marcus 177–8n2
Bunin, Ivan 53n22, 63

C

Cancer Ward: A Tale in Two Parts (Solzhenitsyn, A.) 66, 88–9, 259
Caruth, Cathy 71, 78–9
Cendrars, Blaise 114
Cézanne, Paul 190
Chekhov, Anton 64
"Cherry Brandy" (Shalamov, V.) 60–61, 134, 192–3
Chuzhak, Nikolai 23
clandestine writing 36–7
Cohn, Dorrit 282n29
Commission for the Study of the Natural Productive Forces (KREPS) 227–8
Conio, Gérard 99–100n4
consciousness 21, 79, 144, 150–1, 154, 159, 209
  Hegelian consciousness 203, 223
counterfactual history 210–16, 221–3
creativity 32, 78–9, 81, 87, 114, 119, 120, 128, 130, 135, 138, 146–9
Crowley, Timothy J. 195n55

D

Dal', Vladimir 115, 232–3, 245
Dante Alighieri 65–6, 246
Debenedetti, Leonardo 108–9n27
Decembrist rebellion 232
defamiliarization 104, 278
dehumanization 113, 251
Deleuze, Gilles 178n3, 190, 191
  on Bacon 190–91
Demidov, Georgii 274n8
Derrida, Jacques 136–7
Didi-Huberman, Georges 120n5
discontinuities 7, 17–30, 33, 35, 37–43, 70, 90, 211, 234
Dobrovol'skii, A.Z. 106–7, 109, 110
Dolgun, Alexander 282
Dostoevsky, Fyodor 48, 66, 184
Douglas, Mary 180
drama, dramatic 9, 27, 33, 38, 48, 50–2, 53, 56, 75–6, 121, 276–7, 188
Duskan'ia Springs 20

E

Eco, Umberto 272
"écriture automatique" 62
Ehlers, Anke 91
Ehrenburg, Ilya 115, 264
Eiland, Howard 177–8n2
Ekibastuz 30, 33, 35, 38, 41–2, 89
Engels, Friedrich 39
epic literature, Solzhenitsyn's aim of excellence in 48
Erlich, Victor 49n10
Esipov, Valerii 57n31, 65n60, 99–100n4, 177n1, 257
ethics, attitude towards women as litmus test of 249
Etkind, Aleksandr 123n16
Evtushenko, Yevgeny 48

F

famines in Soviet Russia, history of 233–4
Fedin, Konstantin 34
fictionalized testimony 272
first and second readings, difference between 275–6
The First Circle (Solzhenitsyn, A.) 33, 36, 38–9, 51, 65, 66, 88–9
Fra Beato Angelico 125
Frank, Sisi K. 151, 155
Frank, Susanne 120–21, 129–30
freedom 212, 215–16, 223, 244
Freud, Sigmund 79

G

Gall, Alfred 71, 92
Galois, Évariste 33–4
Gauguin, Paul 189
Genette, Gérard 275n12
Gilmore, Leigh 92
Ginzburg, Evgeniia 251
Ginzburg, Lidiia 151
Glad, John 61n47, 112n35, 126n26, 179n8, 271n2, 273n5
The Gold Medal (Shalamov, V.) 264–80

Grankina, Nadezhda 257
Graphite (Shalamov, V.) 124, 126–7, 129
Grodzenskii, Sergei Y. 55n24
Grodzenskii, Yakov D. 62n49
Gronas, Mikhail 93n49
Gubser, Michael 177–8n2
Gulag uprisings 42, 241
Gullotta, Andrea 8, 70–96
Gumilev, Nikolai 241

H

Hakarmi, Batnadiv 285n35
Hamsun, Knut 124
hand
  creativity of writing by 135–6, 196
  imprint from slap of 198
  skills with tools, learning about 170
  tactility of 178
Harari, Yuval Noah 277n16
Hayward, Max 280n24
Heffermehl, Fabian 7, 9, 124n17, 129n44, 177–8n2, 252
Hegel, Georg W.F. 203
  Hegelian consciousness 203
  poetry under conditions of prose 64–7
Heine, Heinrich 31
Hemingway, Ernest 276–7
history
  of Gulag, nodes of 216–21
  in *Gulag Archipelago*, variety of approaches to 222–3
  historical development, advocacy of natural change in 208–9
  lost paths of 203–4
  pathway of, alternative based on 1955–56 moment 220–21
  perception in Soviet Russia 122
  view of Solzhenitsyn on 208–10
Holmes, Emily A. 86–7
Holocaust 1, 122, 123, 144, 151

I

Icons 39, 124, 129–30, 137
innovation, Shalamov's concerns about 57
intertextuality 112–13
  hidden intertextuality 133
Iser, Wolfgang 275n11
Ivanov, Viacheslav 114

J

Janić, Josefina Lundblad 125n25, 177n1, 249–270
Jaspers, Kasper 1
Jennings, Michale W. 177–8n2
Joyce, James 66
Judd, Donald 120n5
Jurgenson, Luba 7, 9, 89, 93–4, 99–118, 108–9n27, 111–12n33, 114n41, 120–21, 129, 157, 160–61, 276n13
juvenalia 30–31

K

Kafka, Franz 66
Karlsohn, Irina 11, 203–26
Kashketin, Lt. Yefim (NKVD) 238–9
Kengir rising (1954) 242
Khlebnikov, Velimir 113–14
Khrushchev, Nikita 33, 53
Klimova, Natal'ia 264–80
Konson, Lev Feigelevich 71, 92–3
Kosiński, Jerry 281
Kruchenyh, Aleksei 113–14
Kuntsman, Adi 250

L

LaCapra, Dominick 71, 79–81, 86, 87
laconicism 22, 23–4, 28, 39, 43, 147
lacunae, errors and discrepancies in *Gulag Archipelago*, effect of 231
landscapes 126–7, 160–2
Larch Tree, message of 194–8
Lavrenev, Boris A. 34, 39
law of lawlessness as *taiga* in Gulag 179–83
Lawrence, D.H. 190
LEF (Left Front of Arts journal) 18–19, 23
Lefort, Claude 243

Lenin, Vladimir I. 17, 39–40
Leonardo da Vinci 123
Leonovich, Vladimir 45n3
Lermontov, Mikhail 34, 46–7, 59, 84
Leshchenko-Sukhomlina, Tatiana 257
Levi, Primo 78, 108–9, 130, 133–4
Lévinas, Emmanuel 180
Likhachev, Dmitrii S. 236–7
Lipski, Leo 71
Literary Contemporary (journal) 25
literature and literary materials
  literary ideal of Shalamov 54
  memory, work of extraction in 198
  "practical immortality," potential for 197
  reality, facticity and meaning in 194–8
  space of, author's way towards it and 110–15
Literature of Fact 23, 155n34, 194
Littell, Jonathan 281
Longfellow, Henry W. 63
Lotman, Iurii 56–7, 136, 203–4, 207–10, 223
Lucretius 195
Lukács, Georg 66
Lundblad-Janjić, Josefina 11, 249–70
Lungina, Lilianna 280n24

M

Maiakovskii, Vladimir 22, 48
Maiofis, Mariia 111–12n33
Mamardashvili, Merab 153
Mandelstam, Nadezhda 48, 61–2, 115, 138–9, 192, 280n24
Mandelstam, Osip 134–6
manuscripts and typescripts, surviving volume of 30–31
martial defiance in Solzhenitsyn's verses 42–3
Marx, Karl 39
Marxist-Leninism, reflection in aesthetics of 198
materiality 130–31, 177–8n2, 196, 198
matrimonial unions, otherwordly power of 263
"Matriona's Home" (Solzhenitsyn, A.) 48–50, 51–2
Maupassant, Guy de 28
memory
  artwork and 119–23
  body as medium of 127–8, 150, 155–67, 171–2
  consciousness, memories blocked by 150
  cultural memory, mechanisms of 144–5
  device in Shalamov's creative process 114
  distinction between conscious, preconscious and traumatic 145–6
  as hiding-place for Solzhenitsyn 35
  human body as vehicle for 150–51
  "Human Memory," Shalamov's concept of 171
  innocent nature, violence of memory and 183
  'involuntary memory,' Proust's concept of 151–2, 155
  material of, constant drawing by Shalamov on 107–8
  mechanisms of 143–4
  memory dissemination, technique of 123–4
  memory-structure of tactile, traumatic and processual components 130–31
  meta-textual memory 137, 138
  oblivion and 142–6
  past and future orientation of 112–13
  performativity of 120
  Plato's definition of 124
  of *predolenie* 194–5
  remembrance, creativity of Shalamov and 159–60
  renewal of, possibilities for 108
  repressed memory 144
  restoration of lost memory (under camp conditions) 170–4
  resurrecting memory through literature 146–55
  testimony and 130
  trauma and dealing with 128–9
  traumatic memory 8
  violence of 183–5
Mendeleev, Dmitri 100–101
Merleau-Ponty, Maurice 177–8n2, 179n5, 188, 194n52
Mesnard, Philippe 108–9n27

meta-poetical reflections 156–7
metaphysics, eradication from concept of art 190–4
Mikhailik, Elena 7, 11, 70, 74, 75, 99–100n4, 104n14, 111–12n33, 177n1, 227–48, 280n26
Mikhailov, Oleg 115
Mikheev, Mikhail 111–12n33
mnemonics 20, 35, 78, 90, 93, 150–1, 183, 187
Morson, Gary S. 205–6
Musil, Robert 66

N

Nabokov, Vladimir 53n22
Narbut, Vladimir 114
Nature 183, 192, 195–6
Nekrasov, Nikolay A. 84
Nicholson, Michael A. 7–8, 17–44, 46n6, 62n50, 280n23
Nietzsche, Friedrich 150–51, 183
Nivat, Georges 6, 43
NKVD 34, 114, 216, 238
nodes of history, construction of 218–21
Nodier, Charles 116
Novyi Mir (literary journal) 53

O

The Oak and the Calf (Solzhenitsyn, A.) 74, 89, 90, 264
oblivion and memory 142–6
October (journal) 25
Olszewski, Krystyn 108–9n27
One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich (Solzhenitsyn, A.) 7, 12, 30, 70, 90, 104, 211, 234
  beginnings of 17, 37, 39
  camp life, positive moral effect from 133–4
  discontinuities in evolution of 7, 12, 17, 29, 30, 32, 37–43, 70, 90, 211, 234
  emergence of 32–3
  laconism of 39
  origins and antecedents of, accessibility of 43
  publication of 47, 53
  reader information in, direct nature of 276
  Shalamov's letter to Solzhenitsyn on 72–4, 94
  tenses, switching from past to present 89
  "training audience," question addressed in 272

P

Pasternak, Boris L. 19, 21, 45, 115, 126n28, 129, 186–7, 191, 196
  evasive expression in writing of 186
  performativity 120–1, 137
Petrov, Vladimir 281
"phonetic classes," Shalamov's arrangement of 58, 59
Pil'niak, Boris A. 27
Piranesi, Giovanni Battiista 29
Plato 124–5, 136–7
Podoroga, Valerii 184n20
poetry
  artistic deformation in 184
  attitude of Solzhenitsyn towards verse drama from camps 35–6
  challenging conceptionalization of (Shalamov) 63–4
  classical Russian poetry, Shalamov's admiration for 58–9
  classical Russian poetry, Solzhenitsyn's predilection for 46
  conflict, poetics of 136
  as crutch in desolation of camps for Shalamov 18–19
  differences in Solzhenitsyn's and Shalamov's understandings of 45–6
  effect of constrained use of verse over several years (Solzhenitsyn) 36–7
  generation of 196
  of Gulag system, blurring of tenses and trauma in 93
  Kolyma lyric (Shalamov) 21
  martial defiance in Solzhenitsyn's verses 42–3

poetry (cont.)
meta-poetical reflections of Shalamov, bodily metaphors and motifs in 156–7
mission of the poet 185–6
nature of things, knowledge in 195–6
poetic creativity, forgetting as barrier to 146–7
poetic dimension of *Gulag Archipelago*, syntax and 51–2
poetic senses, Shalamov's choice of 183–4
prose and, production of meaning in 160–61
redactions of poems for Shalamov 63
Shalamov on writing poems 56
Shalamov's poetry of 1930s 18
Solzhenitsyn's aim of excellence in 48
Solzhenitsyn's criticism of poetry of Shalamov 53–4, 66–7
technological process of writing for Shalamov 62–3
Theory of Verse (Timofeev, L.) 34
traditional poetry, adherence to laws of 57–8
untranslatability of 185
verse of Solzhenitsyn from Gulag, motifs within 41–3
viewed in contradistinction to prose by Shalamov 21–2
violence in, use of 184
polyphony 106, 234–5
Potebnia, Aleksandr 278
Prigogine, Ilya 209
"The Prophet" (Mikhail Lermontov poem) 59
prose
documentality and "new prose" for Shalamov 196
force in nature and force in, principle of balance between 192
generic re-orientation towards (Solzhenitsyn) 36
literary tastes in wartime and after in favour of 34–5
novel, historical experience of readers in 184–5
poetry and, production of meaning in 160–61
of Shalamov, submerged tendencies parallel to 138–9
viewed in contradistinction to poetry by Shalamov 21–2
writing of, ideal of "new prose" in Shalamov 115–16, 277–8
"On Prose" (Shalamov, V.) 75–8, 107, 121, 148, 177–8
Proust, Marcel 66, 150–5
pulsation method of Shalamov, meaning of 281–2
Pushkin, Aleksandr 22, 34, 36, 46, 48, 58–9, 61–2, 84

R

The Red Wheel (Solzhenitsyn, A.) 11, 32, 48, 51, 104, 203–10, 212, 219, 222
Rembrandt van Rijn 131
remembrance, creativity of Shalamov and 159–60
Remizov, Aleksei 115, 119
Repin, Il'ja 131
Reshetovskaia, Natal'ia A. 32
resistance 212, 213–15, 241–4
restoration of lost memory (under camp conditions) 170–4
resurrecting memory through literature 146–55
rhetoric of history in *Gulag Archipelago* 227–46
rhythm, Shalamov's use of 60
Ricoeur, Paul 143–4
Riegl, Alois 177–8n2
Rilke, Rainer Maria 55, 149–50
Rossi, Zhak 72n7

S

Saint-Exupéry, Antoine de 277–8
Salinger, J.D. 282n28
Sandomirskaia, Irina 7, 10, 131n50, 177–200
Sapgir, Genrich 57
Sapropel Committee 227–9, 240

Saxena, Ranjana 66n62
Scammell, Michael 31n50
Scherbakowa, Irina 123n14
Schmid, Ulrich 8, 45–69, 133n59
Schoeller, Wilfried 123n14, 135
Schönfeld, Sabine 91
sex and love, female experience in quest for 263–4
Shalamov, Tikhon 131–2
Shelley, Parcy Bysshe 278
Shentalinskii, Vitalii 45n3
Shklovskii, Evgenii 26
Shklovskii, Viktor B. 23–4, 190–91, 194, 278
show trials 219–20
Shraer, Maksim D. 53n22
Shrejder, Julii 147–8
Siedlecki, Janusz Nel 108–9n27
Siniavskii, Andrei 91
Sirotinskaia, Irina 20n11, 76–7, 80, 139, 148–9, 185n22–3
Sirotkina, Irina 157n36
Skuratov, Malyuta 216
Smith, Gary 177–8n2
Socialist Realism 66
Solov'ev, Sergei 20n11, 56n28, 177n1
Solovki 235–7
sound repetition, article in *Semiotics and Information Technologies* 57
Soviet Writers' Union 31, 42
specificity 10, 120, 122, 138
Spencer, Herbert 278
Stalin, Josef (and Stalinism) 1, 2, 7, 17, 51, 66, 77, 115–16, 143, 185, 212, 217–18, 238
  death of Stalin, mass protests following 242
  re-Stalinization of Russia 123, 136
Stella, Frank 120n5
Stolyarova, Natalia 11, 264–8
Stolypin, Petr 204
Sukhikh, Igor 234
Surovtseva, Nadezhda 257, 258
Sword, K.M. 80
Sylvester, David 187n33, 191n42
symbolism 29, 35, 39, 82–3, 120n5, 129, 134, 138, 157, 159n46, 245, 266, 273n6

T

tactility 119–39, 194, 198
Tagantsev, Professor Vladimir 240–41
The Taiga, touch of "Irreversible Abomination" in 179–83
  law of lawlessness in Gulag 179–80, 186
  word creation and world creation in 127
target audience 276–80, 285–6
Tempest, Richard 280n23
terror 1–2, 211–12, 245, 266
  political terror 178
  reproduction of past terror 123
  Soviet policy of forgetting about 143
  subject and object of (executioner and victim) 9, 121, 136
  taiga and reproduction of 184
  war and, lived experience of 191
testimony 2, 6, 78, 105–6, 108, 123, 128, 130, 137, 138, 229, 231, 250, 256, 260, 277, 280n24, 282–3
  fictionalized testimony 272
  limits of 269
  literary testimony, mechanisms of 100, 268–9
  memory and 122, 130
  moral testimony 29
  self-deconstructive testimony 136
Theater of Cruelty of Shalamov 177–8
"Through the Snow" (Shalamov, V.) 110–12, 113, 114, 272–4, 282
Thun-Hohenstein, Franziska 5, 7, 9–10, 120–21, 142–76
"On Tick" (Shalamov, V.) 274–5, 280–81, 282–3
Timofeev, Leonid I. 34
Toker, Leona 11–12, 70, 74, 93, 128n38, 184n21, 250, 271–88
Tolstoy, Leo 34–5, 48, 111, 114, 131, 184, 282n28
traces 11, 26, 29, 32, 39, 43, 48, 51, 80, 111, 113–15, 120, 124–7, 162, 171, 173, 222, 230, 236–7, 250, 266
trauma
  acting out trauma 81, 87, 90–2
  Caruth's theory of, repetitiveness in 79
  clinical analysis of 80
  collective trauma 10, 144
  dealing with memory and 128–9

trauma (cont.)
experiences of, difference between Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn 74–5, 89–90
LaCapra and 79–80
literary form and, correlation between 90
literature of 72–94
memory and 128–9, 130–31
mnemonics and 78, 93
post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) 72, 78, 80, 86–7, 90–1
psychosomatic symptoms of 144
tactile trauma 122–3, 129
trauma studies 70–2, 91
traumatic events, verb tenses in descriptions of 83–4
traumatic events witnessed or suffered in *Gulag Archipelago* 89–90
traumatic flashbacks, Shalamov's evocation of 79, 80
traumatic memory 8, 10, 150–51
traumatic memory, Shalamov's experience of 145–6
traumatic scenes, repetition of 81, 90–1
writings of Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn on 72–94
Tret'iakov, Sergei M. 18, 23–4, 194
Trifonov, G.N. 22n20
Trotskyite sympathies, Shalamov's arrest on grounds of 18
truth 23, 28, 35, 39, 51, 61, 61–5, 67, 81, 122, 137, 147, 183, 187–8, 190–91, 194, 196
Tsvetaeva, M.I. 22
Turkina-Stein, Veronika 99
Tvardovskii, Aleksandr T. 34–5, 36, 53
20th Century (journal of Soviet Writers' Union) 31

U

Uspenskii, Boris 136

V

Vergangenheitsbewältigung (coming to terms with the past) 1–2, 9, 122, 130–31, 136
Vernadskii, Vladimir 227–8
Veselovskii, Aleksandr 144
Vigdorova, Frieda 145
violence
human beings at Kolyma at mercy of 157–8
of memory 183–5
overpower, integration as strategy to (*preodolet*) 10, 178, 189, 190, 194
Vitebsky, Piers 129n43
Vlasov, General Andrei 81n23, 82
Volkova, Elena 28, 111–12n33
Voprosy literatury (journal) 63
Vorkuta mass execution (1939), depiction of 238–40

W

Wachtel, Andrew 6, 203, 206
Weinrich, Harald 143–4
women
mothers, motherhood, pregnancy 255–6, 262
prostitutes 253–4
representation of 249–51, 256–64, 264–8, 268–9
Woolf, Judith 108–9n27
Wordsworth, William 278

Y

Young, Sarah J. 71, 184n21, 274n7, 276n14

Z

Zhigulin, Aleksandr 45
Zimbardo, Philip 80
Zubchaninov, Vladimir 239–40